

# ITALIA!

Issue 130 September 2015 £4.40

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HOLIDAYS PROPERTY FOOD WINE CULTURE PEOPLE

## BEYOND ROME

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Why Lazio is being called 'the new Tuscany' for property

### Sicily uncovered

Why you should head northwest

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# Welcome!



Whilst most of us would love to own a property in Rome, the practicality – and the associated expense – is prohibitive. The Italian capital is a notoriously expensive city to purchase even the smallest of dwellings within. However, venture beyond the city walls and there are bargains to be had... The broader region of Lazio,

within which Rome sits, offers a plethora of homes that will cost you a fraction of the price of buying in the city itself. In this issue of *Italia!* Fleur Kinson investigates your options for buying a house in what's rapidly overtaking Le Marche as the Italian hotbed for property purchase. Join her on page 20.

Elsewhere in this issue we explore both the mainland of Italy and its islands, especially the relatively unexplored northwest of Sicily (see page 32). We take time out to discover Lake Iseo (page 41); we trace the history (and the present, and the future) of Italian icon Alfa Romeo (page 52), and we send a journalist back to Tuscany – after more than 30 years away – to see if the region really does still live up to the hype (starting on page 64).

And, of course, we present you with an abundance of Italian recipes to try in your own kitchen, we indulge (and why not?) in the fine Amarone wines from the Veneto, and we partner with coffee machine maker De'Longhi, who have provided a selection of recipes that utilise the 'black gold'. Our recipe section starts on page 77.

*Paul P.*

Paul Pettengale Editor

PS Italia's brand new guide to Venice, the Veneto & Beyond is on sale now (£7.99). Visit [www.italytravellandlife.com/italiaguides](http://www.italytravellandlife.com/italiaguides) for details.

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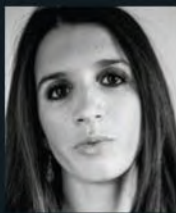


Lazio has been described as the 'new Tuscany' by property experts

**AWARD WINNER!**  
The Italian Tourist Board voted *Italia!* the 'Best Overall Publication 2011'

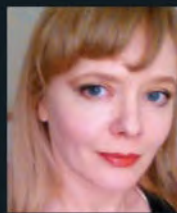


## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



known northwest of the island, an area of great peace and tranquillity, but also of a very distinctive character. Join her on her exploits on page 32.

**SARA SCARPA** harks from Venice, of which she has written about many times for *Italia!* magazine. In this issue, however, she travels to Sicily, taking time to explore the lesser-



increasingly popular with both domestic and overseas property purchasers. Why? Get Fleur's insider perspective, starting on page 20.

**FLEUR KINSON** ventures from the Italian capital and into the surrounding region of Lazio for this issue's *Homes In...* feature. The area around Rome is becoming



does live up to the reputation it's managed to acquire. His conclusions are arrived at with one of this issue's *Discover Italia!* features from page 64.

**CHRIS ALLSOP** last visited Tuscany as a child. Now, as a seasoned travel journalist he decided to return, wondering whether what is arguably Italy's most famous regions really





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**Chris Allsop** last visited Tuscany as a young boy. Thirty years later he decided to go back.

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YOUR ITALIA!

# READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Send us your favourite photos from your Italian travels, and each month the best photo will win a bottle of **Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco** and cooler!\*



## ▲ THIS MONTH'S WINNER

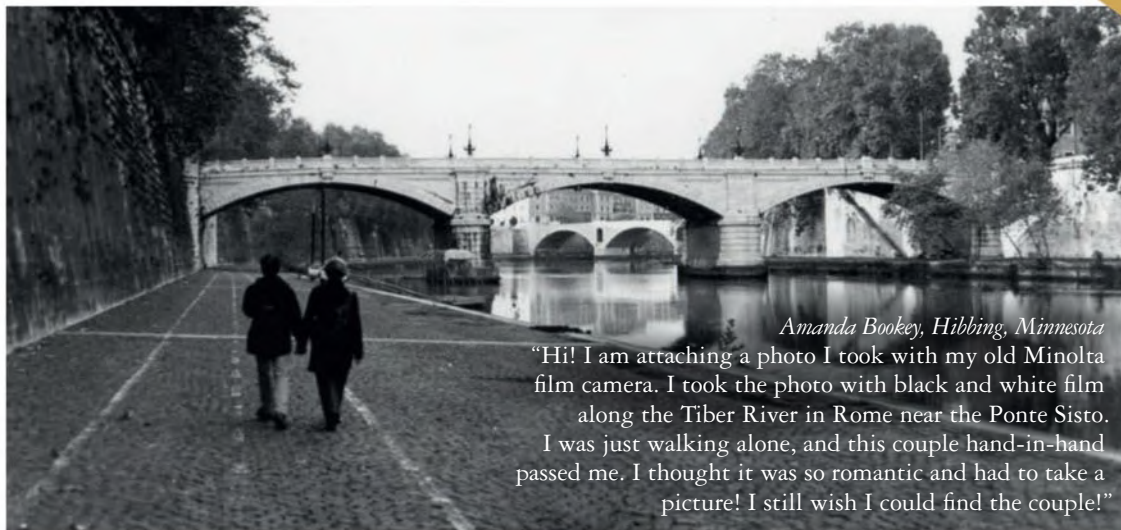
*Brian Lloyd Duckett, by email*

"Please see the attached, it was taken last week in Venice, on a trip out to Burano. We were sitting on the wall looking out to the Lagoon, enjoying a gelato, when this guy came past..."





**WIN!**  
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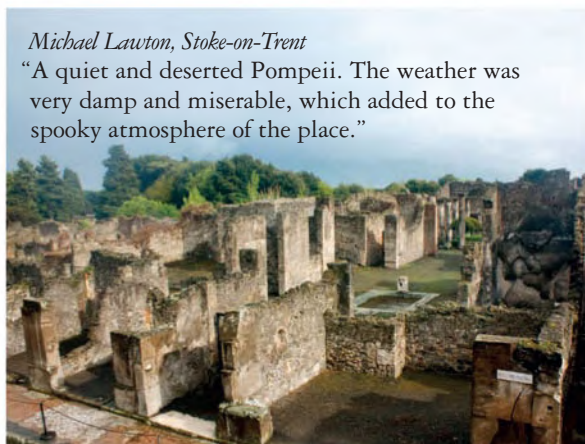


*Amanda Bookey, Hibbing, Minnesota*

"Hi! I am attaching a photo I took with my old Minolta film camera. I took the photo with black and white film along the Tiber River in Rome near the Ponte Sisto. I was just walking alone, and this couple hand-in-hand passed me. I thought it was so romantic and had to take a picture! I still wish I could find the couple!"

▼ *Robert Gray, Los Angeles, California*

"This photo was taken in Assisi during the Mille Miglia. The auto is a 1929 Mercedes-Benz 720 SSK. This is a great event for any auto enthusiast, as the Franciscan appears to be."



*Michael Lawton, Stoke-on-Trent*

"A quiet and deserted Pompeii. The weather was very damp and miserable, which added to the spooky atmosphere of the place."



*Catherine Crehan, Rotterham*

"The sea at Cefalù, Sicily. This is the archway that gives you your first glimpse of the coast."



◀ *Eldar Øye, Norway*

"This was taken in Riomaggiore. It is a symbol of the good life and the atmosphere we experienced on our hiking trip to Cinque Terre."

**HOW TO ENTER** Email high-resolution (300dpi) jpegs of your photos of Italy to [italia@anthem-publishing.com](mailto:italia@anthem-publishing.com) or send prints to 'Reader Photo Competition' at the address given on page 18. Please include a brief explanation of your photo, plus your name, delivery address and a phone number (for our couriers). You must be over 18 to enter.

**READER OFFER** *Italia!* readers get a 10 per cent discount off Nino Franco wines from [www.sommelierschoice.com](http://www.sommelierschoice.com) until 1 December 2015 by entering the code 'italia10' at the checkout.

Please note: Any photos you submit must be your own work and you must have the right to send them for inclusion on this page. By sending your entry, you are confirming that *Italia!*'s use of your photo(s) will not constitute infringement of any rights, and confirming that you are over 18.



\* Prosecco and cooler delivered to mainland UK addresses only



# THIS MONTH

## September 2015

In **Italian news** this month, investment opportunities in real estate and privatised industry, and a tale of dentistry in the Stone Age...



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### THE HOME OF PASTA GOES UP FOR SALE

If you won £15.5 million on the lottery, what would you buy with it? You could snap up a swanky yacht... Perhaps a small flat in Kensington... Or how about a whole hamlet in Italy? A tiny village in the Umbrian countryside, known locally as *Il Borgo* (The Village), has been put up for sale at that price. It does seem a lot of money, but this is no ordinary hamlet: *Il Borgo* is – according to some history books – the birthplace of pasta! Declared a monument of historic and artistic interest by Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the medieval settlement has become a popular hotspot for lovers of food and history. And while there is only a cluster of houses here, plus a church, a few shops and a restaurant, it is considered to be an exciting investment opportunity. Said Annabel Smith, International Sales Manager at Jackson-Stops & Staff estate agents, "This is a unique opportunity for someone to own a piece of Italian history, which would make a lucrative tourist resort in what is one of Italy's most sought-after regions." You'd better start saving your 'pennies'!

SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...



### HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW...

A hundred years of Italian hair and make-up trends have been condensed into a one-minute video. The quick-fire montage, created by Cut.com, shows American model Mackenzie Altig being given a different style for each decade from the 1910s to the present day. She starts with a curled 'up do' with bright red lipstick – a popular look in the 1910s, as Italian women became more confident on the back of a burgeoning feminist movement. We see a 1920s bob, a tousled look from the 1960s and, finally, a highly accessorised look from the 2010s. [www.cut.com](http://www.cut.com)

### THE AUSTRALIAN AMALFI

The Amalfi Coast is twinned with... Perth, Australia. Well, not officially, but according to new travel magazine *The Escapist* there's a distinct likeness between the popular Italian tourist destination and the Western Australian city – or at least part of it. In an article recommending ten global cities worth visiting, the magazine described The Coombe on Mosman Park's foreshore as "an antipodean Amalfi, an exclusive pocket of real estate with properties hugging the riverside". Considering Perth has previously been labelled "Dullsville", we're not quite sure what to make of that...













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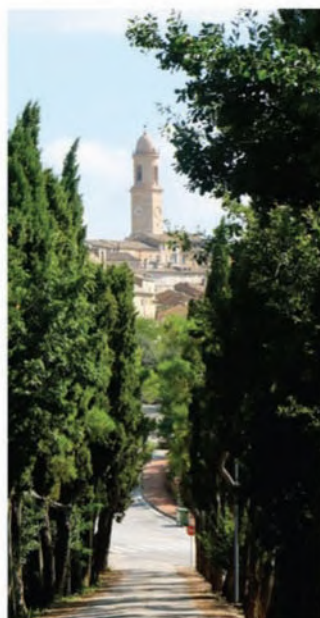


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# ITALIA!'S *Top picks*

Summer's lease is all but spent, and so we turn our thoughts to **fireplaces and kitchens**, indoor hobbies and home comforts. Or maybe there is time for one last weekend away...

## ITALY COLOURING BOOK

Adult colouring books are all the rage these days (in fact, *Italia!* publisher Anthem has just launched a title called *Colouring Heaven*). But let's not forget that kids are rather partial to the pastime, too – and they'll love the *Italy Colouring Book* (no relation to this magazine) from Something Italian. Filled with famous cities and landmarks drawn by renowned illustrator Fabio Vettori, it's both fun and educational, and will make long journeys much more bearable – for the kids and for you. £4.95, [www.something-italian.com](http://www.something-italian.com)



◀ **LAURA VITALE**  
Laura Vitale became an internet sensation when she launched her YouTube cooking show, *Laura in The Kitchen*. And now, for those who prefer a more traditional way of learning, the Naples-born chef has released a companion book of the same name (£15, Clarkson Potter). It contains 120 simple but succulent Italian-American recipes for every course – everything from Pot-Roast alla Pizzaiola to Tortellini with Pink Parmesan Sauce; from Spinach and Artichoke-Stuffed Shells to No-Bake Nutella Cheesecake. We can't wait to get stuck in!

**READ THIS!**



## ▲ LA LOCANDA ROSA ROSAE

If, like us, you're a hopeless romantic, you're sure to fall in love with the Locanda Rosa Rosae hotel in Treviso. A carefully refurbished 16th-century mill, this delightful retreat is a creaky yet charismatic collage of wooden beams, recycled furnishings and exposed machinery. And it becomes even more charming at night, when the whole place is illuminated by candles. Prices vary, [www.locandarosarosae.it](http://www.locandarosarosae.it)

TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...

## *Top 3 gifts for* **OLIVE OIL LOVERS**

"The internal supreme condition for the cooking pot," as Pablo Neruda described olive oil, is good for the entire kitchen...

**1 ALESSI OLIVE OIL POURER**  
For kitchenware that has the 'wow' factor, you can always rely on Alessi. Fashioned from glass and stainless steel, and with curves to die for, its 'Fior d'Olio' olive-oil holder/pourer is effortlessly elegant. It's practical, too, as the cleverly engineered pouring spout enables you to control the amount of oil you pour, as well as the oxidation process. Add some intrigue to your dinner party by filling it with one of the *Le Opere e i Giorni* oils (see right) and getting your guests to guess the flavour! £33, [www.johnlewis.com](http://www.johnlewis.com)





## ▼ COUTURE PIZZA BOARD AND CUTTER

We could happily spend the rest of our days on a remote Tuscan farm, baking pizzas in a wood-fired oven. Sadly, we all have to earn a crust (pardon the pun), so that's unlikely to happen in the near future. But we could still get a taste of the rustic lifestyle with this lovely pizza board and cutter from Harch Wood Couture. With their "perfectly imperfect" shape and easy-clean nature, they're a stylish and practical addition to any kitchen.

£34.99, [www.harchwoodcouture.com](http://www.harchwoodcouture.com)



## ROB BRYDON AND STEVE COOGAN ►

It's hard to put your finger on what makes BBC comedy-documentary *The Trip To Italy* so special. Is it the subtly hilarious interactions between the two stars, Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan? Is it the lavish Mediterranean landscapes that grace every shot? Or is it the sight of inspirational Italian cuisine as the pair hop from restaurant to restaurant? Whichever it is, this spin-off of *The Trip* – which sees Brydon and Coogan trace the footsteps of Byron and Shelley – is a must-watch, especially in its newly released Blu-ray format. £15.99, [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)



**WATCH THIS!**

## MARIO LANZA

With his film-star looks and velvety tones, Mario Lanza was a bona fide heartthrob in the 1940s and '50s. Now the Italian-American tenor is celebrated in a new compilation of his finest Italian and Neapolitan songs. *My Italian Soul* contains 25 tracks, including the highlights from Lanza's *Mario!* and *Caruso Favourites* albums, and even a newly discovered rendition of the classic track *Mattinata*. Heartfelt and richly interpretative, *My Italian Soul* is a singing legend at his very best. £6.99, [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

# MARIO LANZA

## MY ITALIAN SOUL



## ACQUA DI PARMA

Nothing refreshes the skin like a holiday by the sea. But if you're unable to get to the coast, don't worry as you can get all the benefits of an Italian Resort at home. That's the name of a range of products by Acqua di Parma that includes everything from body scrubs to eye creams. We particularly like the Toning Body Oil, a rich elixir that hydrates the skin, leaving it feeling fresher and more elastic. £45 for 200ml, [www.houseoffraser.co.uk](http://www.houseoffraser.co.uk)



THIS MONTH'S TOP 3... THIS MONTH'S TOP 3... THIS MONTH'S TOP 3... THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...

## 2 OLIVE OIL APRON

Even if you've never wielded an olive-oil bottle in your life, you can pretend you're a true expert by donning this patterned apron by Now Designs. Made from 100 per cent cotton and machine washable, it was woven on an oversized loom, making it six inches wider than a standard, providing a more comfortable fit. You'd just better hope your guests don't ask you to tell them the difference between a *leccino* and a *pendolino*. £34, [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)



## 3 LE OPERE E I GIORNI OLIVE OILS

These single estate, extra virgin olive oils are organically produced in Calabria, marrying fresh fruit and herbs with locally grown Ottobratica olives. Flavours include basil, rosemary, chilli and lemon. The name, which translates as 'Work and Days', comes from the title of a didactic poem by Hesiod, being the work that gave us the myths of Prometheus – who stole fire from the gods and gave it to man – and Pandora, who Zeus commanded Hephaestus to create as man's punishment. But you knew that... £4.99 for 250ml, [www.agrumia.co.uk](http://www.agrumia.co.uk)





# EVENTS IN SEPTEMBER 2015

Film, music, wine and fashion are all celebrated in Italy this month and there is also horse and boat racing to enjoy, not to mention Juliet's birthday...

## VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

2-12 September

Venice

The oldest film festival in the world is now in its 72nd year.

Screenings take place on the Lido, with awards being handed out to notable films, directors and actors. The most prestigious of these is the Golden Lion, which is given to the festival's best movie. Past recipients of the gong have included *Michael Collins*, *The Wrestler* and, last year's winner,

Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat On A Branch Reflecting On Existence*. [www.labiennale.org/en](http://www.labiennale.org/en)

## MACCHINA DI SANTA ROSA

3 September

Viterbo

If you hear the residents of Viterbo, near Rome, saying they've had a "heavy night", they might not be referring to drink. Every year a hundred costumed townsfolk carry a candle-lit tower containing a statue of the town's patron saint, Santa Maria Rosa, – weighing a total of five tons! – through the narrow streets of this medieval settlement. With all other illumination in the town switched off during the procession, it makes for an enchanting spectacle.

## FESTA TE LU MIERU

4-6 September

Carpignano Salentino

If you're anything like us, you won't need much persuasion to attend a wine festival. But just in case you're not tempted by the fruits of this summer's harvest in the town of Carpignano Salentino, Lecce, there's also three nights of live music, dancing, crafts and food stalls to make you giddy. Founded in 1974, the Festa te lu Mieru is now one of the most popular events in this picturesque corner of Italy, and it's not hard to see why.

## SOUTHEND ITALIAN FESTIVAL

5 September

Southend-on-Sea

Seaside towns don't come more quintessentially English than Southend-on-Sea, but for one day only, the local residents will be putting down their buckets and spades, and raising their tricolores – not to mention a glass or two of prosecco! – in celebration of Italian culture. From traditional children's crafts to classic Italian cars, themed entertainment to dollops of delicious gelato, there will be something here for all the family.

## MITO SETTEMBREMUSICA

5-24 September

Milan and Turin

Whether your favourite type of music is classical or choral, jazz or jive, you're sure to find something that gets your mojo rising at this prestigious annual festival. Starting out as a Turin-based event in 1978, the SettembreMusica has now expanded to include venues in Milan, too. Over the years, the programme has featured everyone from Lou Reed to Herbie Hancock – and with ticket packages and even free concerts available, you can enjoy great live entertainment without spending a fortune. [www.mitosettembremusica.it/en](http://www.mitosettembremusica.it/en)

## REGATA STORICA DI VENEZIA

6 September

Venice

As rowing events go, this is every bit as historic as the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race in England. Held in Venice since the 13th century, the Regata Storica starts off with a magnificent pageant where scores of colourful gondolas escort the Doge and his wife up the Grand Canal. Then it's time for the main event – or events – as thousands line the banks of the canal to watch the eagerly anticipated rowing races. We guarantee you'll be 'oars' after all that shouting! [www.regatastorica-venezia.it](http://www.regatastorica-venezia.it)





MITO SettembreMusica, Milan and Turin

Photograph by MITO SettembreMusica (4.IX Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai)  
[CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>), via Wikimedia Commons]

## FESTA DELLA RIFICOLONA

7 September  
*Florence*

Paris may be known as the 'City of Light', but it's Florence's turn to glow at this annual festival. One of the oldest events in the city's calendar, the Festa della Rificolona celebrates the eve of the birth of the Virgin Mary, and people of all ages parade the streets holding handmade lanterns. Throw in a boat procession along the River Arno, and a vibrant food, wine and music fair in Piazza Santissima Annunziata, and it all adds up to an event that you'll never forget.

## DIOTTO

8 September  
*Scarperia*

On 8 September 1306, the town of Scarperia was founded by the Florentine Republic. To celebrate that occasion, the residents of this lovely settlement, northeast of Florence, come together on 8 September every year for the rather boisterous Diotto (which translates as 'eighth day'). Renaissance costumes are worn by men, women and children, while activities include barrel racing, tug-of-war competitions, flag-throwing and re-enactments of the events that shaped the town's history. [www.proloco-scarperia.it/eng](http://www.proloco-scarperia.it/eng)

## JULIET'S BIRTHDAY

12 September  
*Verona*

Shakespeare's greatest heroine may be a fictional character, but that doesn't stop the folk of her home city, Verona, and thousands of tourists celebrating her special day (the exact date of her birthday has actually been contested for years, but they're not going to let that get in the way of a good party). Revellers dress up as Montagues or Capulets, while street artists, musicians and food stalls add to the general merriment. Gents, if you're looking for the perfect opportunity to pop the question, look no further!

## PALIO DI ASTI

20 September  
*Asti*

Regular readers of this magazine will be aware by now that horse races play an important role in Italian culture. The Palio di Asti is one of the oldest in the country, believed to date back to 1275, when the residents of Asti, Piedmont, ran a horse race outside the walls of enemy city Alba as a form of mockery. There's no malice involved nowadays, of course, but the competitors – and the costumed spectators who go along to watch the action – are no less passionate. [www.palio.asti.it](http://www.palio.asti.it)

## MILANO MODA DONNA

23-29 September  
*Milan*

Think of any popular trend in women's fashion, and you can bet your bottom dollar it was showcased at the Milano Moda Donna first. One of the most hotly anticipated events in the fashion calendar, it sees designers from Gucci and Armani to Versace and Roberto Cavalli – not to mention a whole host of up-and-coming names – showing off their new lines. While most of the shows are invite-only, a small number are usually open to the public (see the website for details). [www.cameramoda.it/en](http://www.cameramoda.it/en)

## WELCOME ITALIA

26 & 27 September  
*London*

You may already be an utter genius when it comes to Italian cooking, but that shouldn't stop you visiting this annual show dedicated to the very best food and drink that Italy has to offer. London's Royal Horticultural Halls will be teeming with stalls serving up wondrous tastes and aromas, while a 'cookery theatre' will see some of the UK's top Italian chefs revealing their tricks of the trade. If you don't leave here a better chef, we'll eat our hat! [www.welcome-italia.co.uk](http://www.welcome-italia.co.uk)

Please note that the dates of all events are subject to change. If you plan to attend, check events are going ahead before you travel. All attempts are made to present the correct details.



# VIEWPOINT





Soft turquoise seas are set into relief by harsh granite outcrops on the **Maddalena Archipelago** off the Costa Smeralda, Sardinia. The National Park is spared excessive tourism by its relative inaccessibility...

The nearest of the seven main islands of the Maddalena Archipelago lies within swimming distance of the Sardinian coast (though you would have to be quite a strong swimmer, and pretty good at avoiding boats). There is a regular public boat service from Palau to the main town, comfortably called Maddalena, but this is the Costa Smeralda and most visitors arrive by private yacht. Yet for all its peacefulness and seclusion the archipelago bears the scars of conflict. Ancient fortifications characterise the uplands. The Pisans

and Genoans argued about the islands in the 12th century, Napoleon tried to occupy the main island in his early years, and Nelson set up a naval base here. The Italian Navy established its own base shortly after Unification and, most recently, the USA also had a presence – one that provided considerable employment and permitted the islanders to resist the temptation to turn to mass tourism. Mussolini was once imprisoned here and Garibaldi made it his retirement home. Today it's mostly birds, fish, yachts and a sense of history.







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# LETTERS TO ITALIA!

Share your Italian experiences with us, and tell us what you would like to see in the magazine, by sending your photographs and letters to [italia@anthem-publishing.com](mailto:italia@anthem-publishing.com)...

Photography © iStock

## WAR HISTORIANS

Having just read the August issue of *Italia!* (129), I have to write and congratulate you on bringing to the public's attention the work of the amateur historians and archaeologists of Italy who, with the aid of metal detectors and an awful lot of patience, search known battlefields for items of interest to place in their museums, cataloguing their country's place in world history.

Notification of any remains found are initially given to the Service Personnel and Veteran's Agency at the Ministry of Defence and it is then their task to try and identify the remains and if possible pass their findings along to any surviving family members in order that the family may give their relative the right and proper burial he deserves.

These findings are not the first of their kind. Last summer a British tin hat, clearly showing bullet holes across where the wearer's temple would have been, was handed to a gentleman who has visited the Memorial Cairn on top of Monte Camino for the past twenty-odd years, with other members of the Grenadier Guards Association. The tin hat was recently presented to the Guard's Museum at Wellington Barracks – yet another find made by amateur historians!

It is well known to those who have an interest that there are reported to be the remains of a British soldier buried beneath a road in San Clemente in the province of Caserta. The remains were found alongside a British rifle and a helmet. The remains were discovered by people re-surfacing the road but, not wishing to have their contract revoked while excavations took place, they re-buried the remains!

Likewise, until a few years ago I had no idea that Italy had fought during the First World War on the side of Great Britain and her Allies. Therefore your article "All Quiet on the Eastern Front" (issue 119) was interesting for my research. Italy in the Second World War has always been pushed into the background and was hardly the 'soft underbelly of the Med' as described by Winston Churchill, who later likened it to the Somme in 1916!

Well done for a wonderful magazine. I have subscribed since the beginning and before that to one of the now no longer in-print magazines of the same ilk.

**Ann Hamlet, for and on behalf of Italy 43-45 Campaign Veterans and the Italy Star Memorial Fund**

SEPT 2015  
MONTH LETTER OF THE

## RENTING PROPERTY IN ITALY

The articles about buying a property in Italy are always interesting, although I wonder if there would be merit in a series of articles on the pleasures and perils of renting property in Italy. How does the Italian residential lettings system work? Is there a standard format of lease/tenancy similar to our Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreements? What level of rental payment could be expected and would there be any difficulty in bank transfers? Would the services of a solicitor be necessary?

I'm sure there are many of your readers of a certain age who would love a second home in Italy but are reluctant to buy. A variety of reasons – personal health, partner's health, family commitments or just a change of mind – may mean that the property is only used for a few years. They are then faced with the prospect of selling in what may be a less than buoyant market.

**Mark Makepeace, via email**

*An interesting proposition, Mark – and one we'll follow up on and commission immediately.*

## LA CASA DI MONTALBANO

We have just returned from a wonderful holiday staying at La Casa Di Montalbano in Punta Secca. This is where the famous green shutters and balcony are. Can you please pass my email to Phil Meadows and suggest that he contacts me? My husband Gerald and myself would be delighted to give Phil some information.

**Joan Harris, via email**

*Consider it done!*

## GUERRILLA ART IN FLORENCE

I visited Florence in 2013 for a month whilst attending a language school there. This meant that I got to know the city quite well. As well as my 20-minute walk to school every morning and evening, I also spent hours walking the piazzas and backstreets.

I shan't tell you about the fabulous statues, museums, art galleries or piazzas – you already know about those. No, the thing that intrigued me during my stay was the altered traffic signs. Quite a random thing to take an interest in when there are riches aplenty to feast your eyes upon but it seemed

*Clet Abraham's street art in Florence.*

*The Frenchman has been active in other cities too.*

that very few people were aware of them, or perhaps they didn't think they were worth a second glance when David and Neptune were just around the corner. Once I spotted one I purposefully kept a look out for others. They were mainly No Entry signs which lend themselves to alteration very well but there was also clever use of other signs, my favourite of which is a No Parking sign altered to look like Spiderman's face, and also the Parking sign changed into a skull.

I know now that this 'guerilla art' is the work of a French artist, Clet Abraham, who has lived in Florence for a number of years. Apparently they are easily removable adhesives that Clet and a few friends apply at night, sometimes in plain view of security cameras. He has not gone unnoticed and has earned himself at least one €400 fine for his troubles as, unsurprisingly, the police say that he doesn't have permission to alter the signs. Some may see the signs as an example of graffiti, others may take offence at the Dead End sign adapted to show Christ on the cross, but for me they are quirky, fun works of art in a city that is crammed full with artworks.


So next time you visit Florence, as well as taking in the Bargello and Piazza della Signoria, take a look at the traffic signs as you journey around – see how many you can spot!


**Karen Eynon, via email**


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*The war memorial at Monte Grappa*





# Homes in Lazio

Rome is a justly famed destination, but the rural region that spreads outward from Italy's capital deserves to be much better known. Lovely landscapes and great-value property abound in this underrated part of central Italy, says **Fleur Kinson**...

**L**azio offers an extraordinary contrast – Italy's biggest city coupled with some of its quietest countryside. Mighty Rome sits in the middle of the region, but all around it stretch miles of leafy hills, pretty lakelands and uncrowded beaches. Home to nearly three million people, Rome is Italy's most populous city by a long way. (It's more than double the size of second city Milan). But elsewhere, Lazio is a relatively thinly-populated region of sleepy villages and friendly little towns. All in all, it offers homebuyers the best of both worlds; big city glitz and rustic tranquillity are always within easy reach of each other.

Rome is obviously one of Italy's key visitor destinations, but the delights of rural Lazio are little-known. This is largely because Lazio shares borders with Tuscany and Umbria, whose much-celebrated country charm have long overshadowed Lazio's and left the region relatively unexplored. And yet Lazio is full of all the things that usually pull in the visitors and foreign homebuyers. It has a long coastline, enticing islands, crystal-clear lakes ringed by fertile hills. It has rolling countryside striped with vineyards, quaint old hilltowns and wonderful weather. Plus it has historical relics to die for, with the whole region marking the heartland of both the Roman and Etruscan civilizations.

## THE MARKET

Just prior to the financial woes that began hitting home in 2008, Lazio was subject to quite a flurry of interest among property investors. It was widely tipped to be on the verge of becoming 'the new Tuscany' – with a boom in foreign buyers anticipated. But the international economic crisis put paid to all that. It prompted a huge drop in foreign buyers all over Italy, and so Lazio never saw its predicted moment of glory. Today it's still an under-valued region, with moderate prices (except in Rome, which remains one of Italy's very priciest spots).

Note that, as in other parts of Italy, Lazio's property prices sank a bit between 2008 and the present in the light of there being far fewer foreign buyers around. So now Lazio has homes that were never very expensive to begin with available for slightly less than they would have been asking in 2007. Plus many vendors remain open to offers below their asking price. So if you're looking for an affordable rural idyll in central Italy, you should definitely have a think about Lazio. Its prices are still much lower than in nearby Tuscany or Umbria.

And what kind of prices are we talking about? A very rough guide is always useful. Lazio has many village homes that can be had for less than €100,000 – with small houses ➤



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*Lake Bolsena lies in Alto Lazio, in the north of the province of Viterbo*





## GENAZZANO

Type of property **Villa and villetta**

Number of bedrooms **5**

Price **Reduced to €295,000**

Location **Genazzano**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd ☎ 01322 660988**

**www.casatravella.com**

This lovely five bedroom property is located in a tranquil area of the mediaeval town of Genazzano just 45km and one hour southeast of Rome, and 45 minutes from Ciampino airport, with magnificent views over the valley and Monti Lepini in the distance. The property, which is actually a main villa and smaller villetta consist of the following: Main Villa: Spacious living room with fireplace, kitchen, three bedrooms, and bathroom. Villetta: Kitchen, two bedrooms and bathroom. The properties are attached, although each has its own independent entrance. Each has its own individual terrace, and the property sits in 7,750sqm of land (almost two acres) with a sunny southerly aspect and some 200 olive trees and other fruit trees. Both properties are in excellent decorative order, are centrally heated, within a few minutes walk from all amenities in Genazzano including a number of good eating establishments, and are being sold furnished. The property has a security gate and lighting as well as lighting round the garden and there is ample parking. A beautiful property within easy access of Rome with separate accommodation for guests if required.

*The property has distant views to Monti Lepini*



*Rieti sits on top of a small hill*

in fairly remote villages going for around €50,000 and in more accessible places for double this. Rural farmhouses to restore start at about €120,000, and habitable ones at about €180,000. Rome, as already suggested, is in a very different

Over the past twenty years or so, northwest Lazio – and especially the area around Lake Bolsena – has perhaps become the region's most popular rural stretch with foreign buyers. It's easy to see why this has happened. The rolling, lushly fertile

*The environs of Rieti near the Umbrian border have perhaps the lowest prices in the Sabine Hills*

league in terms of property prices. For a two-bedroom apartment in a reasonably central location, you would probably be looking at an outlay of €300,000 or more.

## KEY RURAL AREAS

If what you're looking for is a rustic retreat, or immersion in charming small-town life, Lazio is a great region to consider. Naturally, there are some parts that are more highly recommended than others. You should look at the area some 20 to 60 miles northwest of Rome – the beautiful hilly surrounds of Lakes Bracciano and Bolsena. Or perhaps 20 to 30 miles northeast of Rome – towards the leafy Sabine Hills. Or, if you like, some 10 to 20 miles southeast of Rome – to the pretty Albano Hills, which also contain a couple of lovely lakes. The more adventurous might also consider the rather wild 'Ciociaria' area that begins about 30 miles east of Rome and spreads for around 50 miles southeast from there.

landscapes here are profoundly beautiful and perfectly unspoilt, and the small towns and villages are very generally very attractive and interesting. Tuscany and Umbria both lie within easy daytripping distance, as does the coast.

*Anguillara Sabazia, Lake Bracciano*





Lake Bolsena itself sits in an environmentally protected basin, and there are far-sighted restrictions on new building which not only preserve the beauty of the area but safeguard the value of homes here. Village homes here can be bought up for around €100,000 and farmhouses regularly go on sale from around €180,000 upwards.

Closer to Rome, Lake Bracciano offers similar delights to Lake Bolsena and its surrounding area. Its property prices are a little higher, however, because it's perfectly possible for residents to commute to work from here into the capital.

With similar prices to those in northwest Lazio, the Sabine Hills area to Rome's northeast is another lovely place of rolling countryside dotted with medieval villages and old castles. It has seduced quite a few foreign buyers over the years and, as in northwest Lazio, you're likely to be able to connect with a few Anglophone residents in addition to the friendly local Italians themselves. The environs of Rieti near the Umbrian border have perhaps the lowest prices in the Sabine Hills.

#### COUNTRYSIDE AND COASTLINE

Seekers of rural idyll who want to make frequent trips to Rome might decide they want to opt for the enchanting Albano Hills area a dozen miles or so southeast of the Eternal City. As indicated earlier, ►



*Rosie bought a home on Lake Bolsena in 2005*

Photograph courtesy of Rosie Martin

## MY LIFE IN LAZIO

**R**osie Martin, originally from Liverpool, owns a small country house near Lake Bolsena in northern Lazio. She bought it as a holiday home in 2005, but is about to make a permanent move there with her new husband – a local man named Massimiliano.

What drew her to Italy, and to Lazio in particular? "I'd missed out on seeing much of Italy," Rosie explains, "as my first husband was a big Hellenophile and we took most of our holidays in Greece. Ancient history was a shared passion of ours. But after we divorced I started exploring Italy on my own and with my sister, and I absolutely fell in love with the country. Obviously I soon got to know Rome and other cities with Classical remains. Then one day a waitress in a café in Trastevere was telling me about her home on Lake Bolsena and I got interested in the area. It sounded beautiful, and I knew the place had been important to the Etruscans and the Romans, so I made a little trip up there. And the rest is... history, as they say!

"My house is about four miles from the lake itself, on a hillside with wonderful views across the water. It was a bit ramshackle when I bought it, but luckily I didn't have to do any major restoration work. I would have found that terrifying! I re-did all the internal décor, refitted the kitchen and bathroom – that sort of thing. I have a good amount of land, and friends say I should have it landscaped, but I prefer it to look a little wild. What's the point of being in the country if you can't go a bit rustic, eh?!

"My plan was only ever to use the house as a holiday home, and it worked very well for that purpose. But of course I got more and more sucked into life in the area. I worked hard at learning Italian, and that really paid off socially. Italians are super-friendly whether or not you have a shared language, but it was far more satisfying when I was able to have full conversations with them. Slowly, Italy began to feel more like home than home itself. And then I met Massimiliano, and that changed everything.

"My advice to anyone thinking of buying a house in Italy is to have a very good look around at all the wonderful areas you might consider. Don't just go for the places you've already heard of. Find an estate agent you can trust and who seems ready to give you a lot of personal attention. And learn Italian! Even if only a little. It makes a tremendous difference to how much you get out of this wonderful country."





## PANORAMIC VIEW AND UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€310,000 negotiable**

Location **Montefiascone**

Contact ☎ **+47 41270620**

**anne.liv.tonnessen@stavanger-kulturhus.no**

Situated in the historic centre of Montefiascone, Lazio, this 100sqm apartment with 30sqm balcony is perfect for those who want to live in a quiet place with all the comforts that living in a town can offer. The apartment, on the top floor of a *palazzo*, has a unique atmosphere and is comprised of two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and living room, plus a dining room overlooking Lake Bolsena. The surroundings are beautiful – you are halfway between Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria. Vineyards and olive groves surround the city. The Mediterranean is 50 minutes' drive away.

*Montefiascone in the province of Viterbo*



*Sperlonga, the home of Emperor Tiberius*

these fertile hills are enhanced by a pair of pretty lakes, as well as several charming little towns such as Frascati and Palestrina. The atmosphere is surprisingly serene considering the area's close proximity to Rome.

If you're looking for some of Lazio's cheapest rural property set amidst mighty landscapes sprinkled with handsome old towns, do investigate the little-known 'Ciociaria' area far to the southeast of Rome, which stretches roughly from the elegant old spa town of Fregene to the dramatic hilltop abbey of Montecassino about forty miles away. Pronounced 'cho-cha-ree-a', this is a rather wild, proud

homebuyers have tended to be distracted by the Tuscan coast further north or the dramatic offerings of Campania further south. The result is that Lazio's coast remains relatively clean and uncrowded, with plenty of good-value property. Sperlonga, Gaeta and Ostia are three hotspots to consider, with a fair bit of attractive new development in all three. You could successfully target Romans and other Italians from within Lazio for rental clientele if you planned on offering holiday rentals.

Sea-lovers should also be aware of the delicious Pontine Islands which sit far out off the southern coast of Lazio. Little-known outside

*Lazio's coast remains relatively clean and uncrowded, with plenty of good-value property*

and fascinating area. It's not wholly unknown to foreign buyers (the town of Veroli and its environs has already drawn a few pioneering British homeowners), but it still has a 'well-kept secret' feel to it, as well as prices to match.

Not many places in Lazio are very far from the sea, of course, but if it's a coastal property you're looking for, this is not a bad region in which to consider buying. Lazio has a long, sandy Mediterranean coastline, but surprisingly few beach resorts of any great fame. Foreign holidaymakers and

Italy, the Pontines offer similar levels of dramatic geographical beauty to Capri a little further along the sea in Campania. Remote and otherworldly, they provide a wonderful sense of private escape.

### THE ETERNAL CITY

Finally, and inevitably, we come to Rome. And Italy's capital city is an entirely different world – certainly property-wise – to the rest of Lazio. As a legendary tourist magnet and a major employment hub, Rome has some of the most expensive property in Italy. Centrally-located two- ➤





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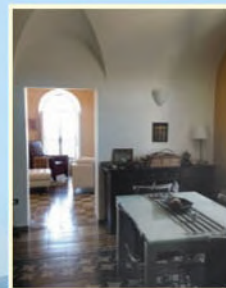
## APARTMENT FOR SALE

### Panoramic view and unique atmosphere

Situated in the historic centre of Montefiascone, Lazio, this 100 sq.m. apartment with 30 sq.m. balcony is perfect for those who want to live in a quiet place with all the comforts that living in a town can offer.

The apartment, on the top floor of a palazzo, has a unique atmosphere and is comprised of 2 bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and living room, plus a dining room overlooking Lake Bolsena.

The surroundings are beautiful – you are halfway between Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria. Vineyards and olive groves surround the city. The Mediterranean is 50 minutes drive away. **Price: €310,000** (negotiable)

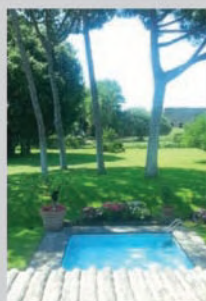


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*I*n the heart of the Ancient Appian Way park, close to the historic centre of Rome, in a beautiful park bordering the Aurelian Walls, we would like to present this prestigious villa – perfectly restored with precious materials.

The real estate property is characterised by a large park of over 30,000 square metres, well-maintained and adorned with flowers and various species of trees. The entrance, through two security gates, leads to an area designated for parking and to a garage.

The villa is set on three floors and has a

beautiful porch. The first floor comprises entrance hall with guest bathroom and utility room, large living room with windows that overlook the park and the pool, large dining room and kitchen area. On the second level we have the bedroom area which includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one with shower and one with bath); large closets in one of the three bedrooms, and a closet in the hallway.

On the basement level there is a service area with kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, a cellar, two storage rooms, laundry room and a large walk-in closet.

Possibility of installing an internal lift. Air conditioning, alarm system, automatic irrigation, swimming pool with jacuzzi, two automatic gates.

The quality of the finishes and the classic style of the interior characterise the property as an ideal main residence as well as a second home close to the centre of Rome.

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## LAZIO REGIONAL GUIDE

**INTRODUCTION**

Lazio sits on the western side of central Italy, a longish region that in many ways is the geographical divide between northern and southern Italy. It bridges the two parts of the country and is home to the nation's capital Rome, the sublime Eternal City. The region has a population of a little over five-and-a-half million, but this figure swells by almost twice that amount each year as visitors flock to see the many attractions of Rome and the Vatican City. Lesser numbers visit the region's other towns and sites. Getting here and travelling around and about is easy, with good road and rail links across much of the Lazio region. Rome is served by two international airports:

Ciampino to the south of the city and Fiumicino towards the coast to the west. With the delights of Rome's city life easily accessible, and a wealth of rural beauty and historic towns all around – not to mention a pretty, up-and-coming coastline – Lazio is a good bet for buying property today, with generally lower house prices than those of its more popular northern neighbours, Tuscany and Umbria.

**ROME**

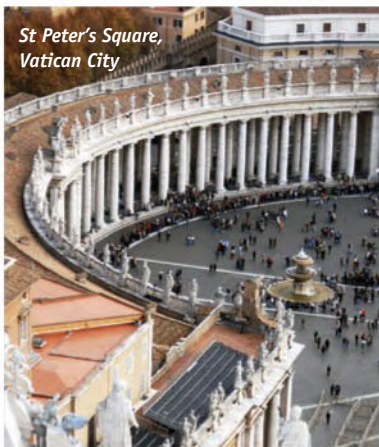
① As you might expect, Italy's capital is one of the priciest places to buy property in Italy. But if you can afford a home here you will reap the rewards: not only is it one of the most iconic and eternally fascinating places that you could hope to have

a first or second home, its rental returns are pretty incredible, with a steady stream of visitors arriving here almost all year round. While all central apartments should do well for holiday rentals, the most popular are places within easy reach of a metro station and those that boast outdoor space in a terrace or balcony.

**NORTHERN LAZIO**

② This picturesque area of Italy runs from just north of Rome to Lakes Bracciano, Vico and Bolsena. It was once a highly volcanic area – the trio of popular lakes were formed in the craters, and the surrounding countryside was made extremely fertile thanks to the lava deposits in the soil. As a result the vegetation is





*St Peter's Square,  
Vatican City*

lush, and vines, olive and fruit trees flourish. The area is also known as La Tuscia and was originally occupied by the Etruscans, with evidence of their presence scattered across the area today. Northern Lazio is popular with both Italian and foreign buyers – and demand for property is increasing – but it remains, in general, less pricey than nearby Tuscany and Umbria. There are several pretty, historic towns in this part of Lazio, which would make a great base for a second home in a very 'Italian' part of the country, with good transport links, lovely scenery and a good range of amenities. The lakesides are popular holiday destinations too in a region that doesn't boast the most highly sought after coastal resorts.

## CENTRAL LAZIO

③ To escape the stifling summer heat, Romans tend to head for the local hills, in particular the hill-towns of the Castelli Romani. The climate and beauty of this rural area have made it an ideal summer retreat since Roman times. In this area you'll find lovely Tivoli with Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este, both of which attract many tourists today. Other gorgeous country villas in the area ensure that there is plenty to keep visitors occupied if they head out of the capital for a day or two. There are decent holiday rental prospects here, and the area, which is the region's most prolific area for winemaking, is a good spot to find yourself a base in very pleasant surroundings.

## SOUTHERN LAZIO

④ In general, southern Lazio is a quieter part of the region, a world away from the bustle of Rome. It's not as rich in historic remains as the north, but there is a growing tourist industry here, especially in Ciociaria – an unspoilt area in the foothills of the Apennines. Although this part of the region is starting to come to foreign buyers' attention, it is still largely undiscovered and prices here are some of the lowest in Lazio. If you'd like somewhere tranquil, pretty and steeped in traditional Italian charm, but within reach of Rome, this could be the area for you. At Lazio's furthest southern reaches, the landscape is more typical of Italy's south, markedly drier and less lush than northern Lazio, but the coastline is the best in the region, with attractive coastal towns like Sperlonga (former home of Emperor Tiberius) and Gaeta with its atmospheric grotto and huge castle.



*Villa d'Este, a UNESCO World  
Heritage Site at Tivoli, near Rome*



*Rome's Spanish Steps*





## LUXURY VILLA CLOSE TO ROME CITY CENTRE

Type of property **Villa**

Number of bedrooms **4**

Price **On request**

Location **Rome**

Contact **Carratelli Real Estate**

☎ **+39 578 754107 / +39 334 1684212**

✉ **info@carratellire.com** [www.luxuryhomes.it](http://www.luxuryhomes.it)

In the heart of the Ancient Appian Way park, close to the historic centre of Rome, in a beautiful park bordering the Aurelian Walls, we would like to present this prestigious villa – perfectly restored with precious materials. The real estate property is characterized by a large park of over 30,000sqm, well-maintained and adorned with flowers and various species of trees. The entrance, through two security gates, leads to an area designated for parking and to a garage. The villa is set on three floors and has a beautiful porch. The first floor comprises entrance hall with guest bathroom and utility room, large living room with windows that overlook the park and the pool, large dining room and kitchen area. On the second level we have the bedroom area which includes three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one with shower and one with bath); large closets in one of the three bedrooms, and a closet in the hallway. On the basement level there is a service area with kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, a cellar, two storage rooms, laundry room and a large walk-in closet. Possibility of installing an internal lift. Air conditioning, alarm system, automatic irrigation, swimming pool with jacuzzi, two automatic gates. The quality of the finishes and the classic style of the interior characterise the property as an ideal main residence or second home close to the centre of Rome.

The Aurelian Walls



The popular Rome district of Trastevere

bedroom apartments don't often go for less than €300,000 – and often for far more. Holiday rental returns, however, can be excellent. Twelve million visitors come through Rome every year, and many of them prefer the restful privacy and freedom of a self-catering apartment over staying in a hotel.

Owning a home in Rome makes it easy to enjoy frequent short trips from the UK to Italy, of course. There's no hour-long drive out to a house in the country after your plane touches down. And if you're thinking of making a permanent move to Italy, Rome is a good place

Also try to get a property with some form of outdoor space – a balcony, terrace or patio – as this is always a big selling point for leisure visitors. Note that beyond the *centro storico*, some of Rome's most popular districts include Trastevere, Parioli and Prati. Keep an eye on the latest guidebooks to Rome to see which other districts might be up-and-coming or newly fashionable and hip.

Rome certainly is magnificent, but any visitor to Lazio ought to be more aware of the delights that lie far beyond the Italian capital. Yes, all roads lead to Rome, but

*Owning a home in Rome makes it easy to enjoy frequent short trips from the UK to Italy*

to begin your adventure. You won't get lonely or bored, and you'll simultaneously give your Italian language skills a daily workout as well as being able to retreat to English-speaking ex-pat company as often as you like.

If you're just looking for a holiday home and you want to be able to cover as many of your costs as you can by renting it out to holidaymakers when you're not there, there are ways of optimizing rentability and maximising your clientele. Choose a home as centrally-located as you can afford, or at the very least near to public transport services into the centre.

they also lead away from it. And they can lead you into some deeply wonderful places.

Anyone seeking an affordable rural idyll in central Italy should definitely make a careful consideration of Lazio and some of its most beautiful stretches of hilly countryside. In Lazio, the urban whirl and the rustic *dolce vita* are forever within comfortably easy reach of each other. ■

## USEFUL CONTACTS

[www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)

[www.luxuryhomes.it](http://www.luxuryhomes.it)

[www.stavanger-kulturhus.no](http://www.stavanger-kulturhus.no)





THE UMBRIAN CITY OF ORVIETO sits in splendour atop a high rocky crag. The cliffs foiled medieval besiegers, but you can storm the citadel in a comfortable funicular railway. Once there, you'll probably spot the magnificent façade of the cathedral and head inside to view Luca Signorelli's frescoes of the resurrected dead struggling out of the clinging earth to await the Last Judgement. The muscular nudes probably inspired Michelangelo's powerful images in the Sistine Chapel.

If Signorelli had been around from the first occupation of the hill by the Etruscans, around 800 BC, he might have seen quite a few figures emerging from the earth, and descending into it as well; because the settlers soon discovered that their mighty mountain was composed of stone so soft they could almost crumble it between their fingers.

Orvieto is built on a base of tuff and pozzolana, volcanic material deposited there sometime in the last three million years or so. The area has no surface water, so early inhabitants first dug wells, no doubt. But the stone was easily excavated; so over time wells, tunnels, cisterns, and galleries by the hundreds were created. And in Roman times, tons of pozzolana were extracted for cement.

## The Winding Path to Purgatory

*The architect Antonio da Sangallo the Younger was ordered to construct a well that could meet the needs of Orvieto under siege*

In places the excavations pierced the faces of the cliffs, letting in light and air, and for centuries, wherever pigeons could fly in and out, the townfolk hollowed out neat rows of nesting-holes in the chamber walls. These "pigeonhole" walls supplied eggs for breakfast and squab for dinner: creative farming, indeed. You can visit other wonders of the subterranean city, including the columns that keep Orvieto from sinking into its own sub-basement, on the "Orvieto Underground" tour.

But there's a place where you can descend much, much deeper, if you dare.

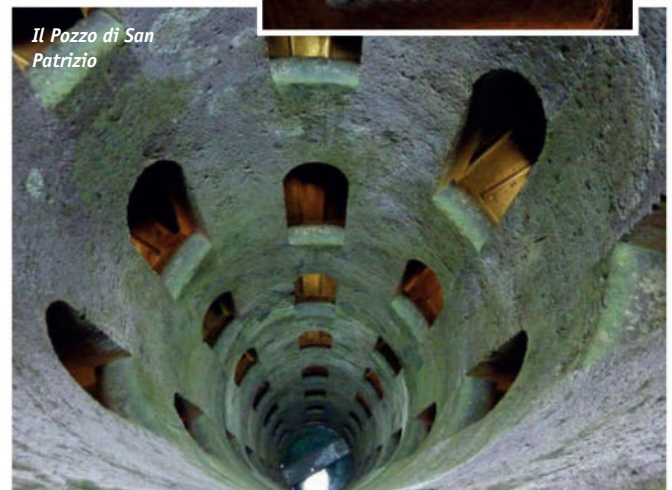
In 1527, Pope Clement VII sought refuge in Orvieto as the mutinous troops of Emperor Charles V sacked Rome. Fearful that Orvieto might also be attacked, Clement ordered the architect Antonio da Sangallo the Younger to construct a well that could meet the needs of the city under siege. Sangallo did – though it took ten years to complete. As the digging continued, people remembered a legend: how Christ, long ago, showed St Patrick a deep pit in County Donegal, Ireland, which was the entrance to Purgatory; and how Patrick converted sinners by showing them the fearful pit. Soon, people called Sangallo's well *Il Pozzo di San Patrizio*, because they thought he might strike Purgatory before he found water.

You can climb down the spiral stairs to see what he found. You won't meet anyone coming up, because Sangallo cleverly made two staircases, arranged in a double helix. Upward-bound donkeys laden with full vessels never encountered descending donkeys carrying empties.

Seventy windows pierce the inner staircase walls, allowing sunlight from the top to dimly illuminate the 248 steps. At the bottom, you will find water that looks very dark, very deep, and very cold. A dip in it might be a bit purgatorial. People who suffer from claustrophobia – or a guilty conscience – should probably not go. In any case, be sure you take the up staircase when you leave. ■



The 'pigeonhole' walls



Il Pozzo di San Patrizio

### ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.



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*Clockwise from top left: Fish is a staple in the Sicilian diet; Erice street view; Cala Azzurra on the island of Favignana; la Grotta Mangiapane; the Zingaro nature reserve museum; Castellammare del Golfo; signpost in the nature reserve; a simple yet hearty lunch, so typically Sicilian*







48 HOURS IN...

# Northwest Sicily

Sara Scarpa turns west out of Palermo to discover the northwestern tip of the Triangle...

Photography © Sara Scarpa unless otherwise stated



**W**hen my family picked Sicily as our summer holiday destination the sense of excitement was immediate and I could not have agreed more with the choice of decision! My first experience of this beautiful island had been shared with friends as a 20-year-old and those memories are still vivid today. At that time, we were camping in Salina, a tiny Aeolian island in the Tyrrhenian Sea north of Sicily, spending the days lying on the beach and going around on our Vespas, and the evenings sitting at the bar with the locals and being part of the summer village fairs. As with most of Italy, the smells, colours and sounds really do stay with you. One of my fondest memories was staying out all night waiting until early morning for the bakery to open to eat some freshly made croissants.

In my mind I have always associated Sicily with sunshine, invitingly cobalt blue sea, *caponata*, *granita con brioche* and village fairs. I had always dreamt of going back one day, and my second visit would only reinforce these beautiful images and the desire of returning once again. ➤





## WHAT TO SEE AND DO

### PARCO ARCHEOLOGICO DI SELINUNTE ①

Marinella di Selinunte 91022, Trapani

☎ +39 0924 46277

Near Marzara del Vallo, overlooking the sea and flanked by beautiful beaches, Selinunte is one of the largest and most spectacular archaeological sites not only in the Mediterranean but in all Europe. Admire the Greek ruins, the remains of the acropolis that was once the heart of one of the most powerful cities in the world, the remains of the enormous temples and the necropolis. At the nearby beach of Marinella di Selinunte you can sunbathe, and eat fresh seafood by the sea at the restaurant La Pineta.

### RISERVA NATURALE ORIENTATA SALINE DI TRAPANI E PACECO ②

Via Garibaldi, 138, C.da Nubia 91027, Paceco

☎ +39 0923 867700

The salt pans are stunning and the small museum about the salt production here is very interesting. A beautiful experience surrounded by fauna and flora, canals and windmills (there are about 60). It is the favourite place of many migratory birds such as *cavalieri d'Italia* (black-winged stilt), herons, wild ducks and flamingos.

### CASTELLAMARE DEL GOLFO ③

Castellamare del Golfo is a picturesque seaside town between Palermo and Trapani. The castle, once an important fort, the pretty little fishing port, the beaches, the shops and the bars full of locals create a beautiful scene.

### MARSALA ④

Close to Trapani, Marsala is famous for being the landing place for Garibaldi and his 'Thousand Men' in 1860, an event which represents the start of Italy's unification – and for its wine. The historical centre is a great place for a stroll and to do some shopping. Piazza della Repubblica, the Duomo, the Porta Garibaldi, the elegant palaces, the Museo Archeologico and the nearby archaeological island of Mozia are all worth visiting.

### GROTTA MANGIAPANE ⑤

Via Scurati, Custonaci

[www.turismo.trapani.it/en/1259/grotta-mangiapane.html](http://www.turismo.trapani.it/en/1259/grotta-mangiapane.html)

Time stands still in the tiny village of Custonaci. Here you can visit the rooms where different crafts are represented (pasta making, wood working, stone cutters, barber, etc.). We were lucky to visit the small rural farm and the cave, with an unforgettable local guide who, at the end of the tour, offered us wine and recited a poem with great passion.



Views of the sea are splendid and plentiful

## DON'T MISS

### CAPONATA

A fantastic Sicilian dish made with fresh vegetables such as aubergines, onions, celery and tomatoes. Olives, capers, basil and pine nuts complete the recipe. A good caponata requires many hours of slow cooking and fresh, local ingredients. It can be eaten as a vegetarian main dish, as a side dish or even spread on a bruschetta.

This time, the destination of our family trip was the main island itself. Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea (it is bigger than Wales) and it comprises many little islands scattered around its coast – the Aeolians, Egadi, and Pelagie islands, Pantelleria and Ustica. The 'Triangular Island' (Sicily is known locally as *la Trinacria*, the Triangle) lies at the heart of the Mediterranean, off the toe of the boot of Italy. It is surrounded by the Ionian and

(such as the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Aragonese, and Spaniards) have left a wonderfully varied heritage with a unique culture, architecture, language, tradition and cuisine. With her eclectic history Sicily is a cultural mix – a melting pot of culture from Europe, Africa and Asia.

On friends' recommendations we decided to explore the northwest of Sicily. We flew to Trapani and rented a car so we could explore. We chose to stay in Macari as we had

*A breathtaking view over the sea from our terrace with amazing breakfasts*

Tyrrhenian Seas and is separated from the Italian region of Calabria only by the 3km of the Strait of Messina.

Because of the size of the island, if you are only visiting for a weekend you will need to decide which area you want to visit. Every Italian region has its differences, whether it be cuisine, wine, culture, dialect – even their patron saints – but Sicily truly takes this to another level. Throughout the centuries its many conquerors

been told that this area is not overrun with tourists. Our B&B, Verdemare, was not fancy but offered exactly what I had envisaged – a smiling and welcoming host (the friendly Mimma), a breathtaking view over the sea from our terrace with amazing sunsets, and great breakfasts with homemade pastries and fresh figs from the owner's garden.

Nearby was a wild beach with crystal-clear sea which was not busy





Scopello



Panorama from Erice



La Grotta Mangiapane

when we were there in mid-June. (For me there is nothing worse than trying to relax on the beach when you are surrounded by hordes of people. The beach of Macari offers the opposite, which was exactly what I was hoping for.) This unspoilt place looks a bit like a North African landscape, which shouldn't be surprising as Africa is not too far away. Some parts of Sicily are on the same latitude as Africa and Tunisia is less than 100 miles away.

After spending the first day exploring the beach of Macari – on the small free train that takes the visitors around – and lying on the stunning beach by Monte Cofano, on the second day we drove to Erice, a small medieval town located on top of a mountain (751m above sea level) overlooking the Tyrrhenian coast of western Sicily. Here, we loved wandering along the maze of cobbled streets, looking at the shops and visiting some of its many churches – there are 60 churches in this tiny town so we could only see a few!

Finally, we stopped at the castle to take photos of the fantastic view over the port of Trapani. And of course, we could not miss out on

stopping by Maria Grammatico's – one of the most famous cake shops in Sicily – where we ate some *cannoli* and bought some pretty marzipan fruits, which tasted delicious!

On the third day we drove to Scopello. After a quick coffee at the local bar of this tiny village, we started our descent to one of the most stunning beaches I have ever seen. Walking down we could catch glimpses of the scene that was about to open up.

When we finally saw it in its entirety, it was just glorious! There it was, a small bay enclosed by rocky walls, fronted by blue water, imposing sea stacks and, to complete this picturesque image, on the left hand side, an old *tonnara* (tuna fishery). This place is the perfect spot to sunbathe while admiring the view, or to snorkel amongst the fish!

After a couple of hours of tanning, we headed back up to the village for lunch. We sat in the shade of the fig trees of a small garden belonging to a tiny, family-run bakery selling typical local bread such as *pane cunzatu* and *sfincione* (Sicilian pizza). This place is an absolute must if you go to ➤

## DON'T MISS

**SCOPELLO**  
Sunbathe in the small, rocky bay at Scopello, snorkel in the transparent sea and eat *pane cunzatu* (seasoned bread) in the small garden of the Panificio (bakery) di Stabile e Anselmo.

## WHERE TO STAY

### VERDE MARE BED & BREAKFAST 6

Via Timpone, 117  
Macari, San Vito Lo Capo  
☎ +39 0923 975464  
[www.bbverdemare.eu](http://www.bbverdemare.eu)

Set in the beautiful Golfo di Cofano, only 3km from San Vito lo Capo, utterly peaceful and completely surrounded by nature. The terrace offers a superb view with amazing sunsets. The owners, the friendly Mimma and her husband, are the perfect hosts for your holiday.

### TONNARA DI SCOPELLO – COMUNIONE TONNARE SCOPELLO & GUZZO 7

Largo Tonnara Scopello, 91014  
Castellammare del Golfo  
☎ +39 339 307 1970

[www.tonnaradiscopeello.com](http://www.tonnaradiscopeello.com)

A few metres from the sea, in the houses where the fishermen used to live. This is not a hotel nor a B&B but an historic estate offering independent houses without the normal hotel services (daily cleaning, reception, breakfast, etc). There is no TV, no phone line and no air conditioning. But the view is magnificent.

### AI LUMI 8

Corso Vittorio Emanuele, 71-74 – Trapani  
☎ +39 0923 540922

[www.ailumi.it/en/](http://www.ailumi.it/en/)

Located in the very heart of Trapani, near the port and therefore very handy for ferries to the Egadi islands, this B&B is simple yet elegant. The rooms, in an historical palace, are located around a pretty courtyard filled with plants. La Tavernetta ai Lumi, the B&B attached restaurant, offers great local dishes and special prices for the B&B guests.

### BAGLIO LA PORTA 9

Riserva dello Zingaro, 91010  
San Vito Lo Capo  
☎ +39 0923 974216

[www.bagliolaporta.it/en/](http://www.bagliolaporta.it/en/)

A 17th-century fortified farmhouse surrounded by the fantastic view of the Zingaro nature reserve, offering rooms with antique and vintage furnishings. There is a large courtyard and terrace where you can enjoy breakfast or an aperitif. Large gardens, pool and spa.

### DIMORA DELL'OLIVASTRO 10

Via Seppi Torrente, 3,  
Contrada Strusceri, Favignana  
☎ +39 0923 921179

[www.dimoradellolivastro.it/en/](http://www.dimoradellolivastro.it/en/)

A stunning boutique hotel on the beautiful island of Favignana at the foot of Monte Santa Caterina. The beautiful bedrooms are decorated in typical Sicilian style and offer a great view facing either the sea or the beautiful gardens.



## WHERE TO EAT

### AZZURRA MAKARI ①

Via Timpone, 112 – Macari

☎ +39 0923 975490

[www.azzurramakari.com](http://www.azzurramakari.com)

Enjoy a magical dinner in front of a breathtaking sunset. The food here is great and Mario and his staff very friendly. I recommend the fish couscous, the *grigliata mista di pesce* (mixed fish grill) and *sarde a beccafico* (stuffed sardines).

€

### RISTORANTE ANTICO BORGO ⑫

Via Timpone, 13 – Macari

☎ +39 0923 975665

[www.anticoborgo.eu](http://www.anticoborgo.eu)

A trendy restaurant in a lovely garden setting with a fantastic view. The menu is full of classic Sicilian dishes with a modern twist and presentation.

€ €

### GARTEN ⑬

Via Erice, 141 – Valderice

☎ +39 0923 892377

This restaurant is a must try. Fantastic atmosphere, a great host and one of the best dinners I have ever had. The owner could not have suggested a better menu for us; the assortment of antipasti – with a *caponata* so good that I have tried (unsuccessfully) to recreate it at home a hundred times – followed by a selection of pasta, *secondi* and desserts I keep dreaming of in England!

€ €

### RISTORANTE GIARDINO CORALLO ⑭

Via G. Amico, 7 – San Vito Lo Capo

☎ +39 0923 972154

[www.ristorantegiardinocorallo.it](http://www.ristorantegiardinocorallo.it)

This restaurant is hidden away a few steps from the main busy street in the centre of San Vito and the Piazza Santuario. It is set in a pretty, colourful courtyard with great atmosphere. Music, plants and ceramic dishes have been chosen with care by the owners, Giovanna and Piero. There is not a menu here but three options of local specialities to choose from, which vary every day. Less choice means the menu is based on the produce bought daily and therefore the food is fresher!

€ €

### PANIFICIO DI STABILE E ANSELMO ⑮

Via Galluppi, 5 – Scopello

This bakery's wooden oven was born more than 50 years ago. The *pane cunzatu* was made from the ingredients poor people had at home – homemade cheese, oil, tomato and anchovies. Originally, this bread was made at home and sold to local families. Today, people stop to eat it in the small garden next to the bakery.

€



## DON'T MISS

**GRANITA CON BRIOCHE**  
Sicilian *granita* is a frozen mixture of simple ingredients: water, sugar and a flavouring – it can be lemon, coffee, pistachio, almond, etc. The consistency is just perfect and you won't find it the same anywhere else in the world.

► **KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES**  
(full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25  
€ € €26-€50  
€ € € € More than €50

Scopello. You must try their *pane cunzatu* – rustic tomato, cheese and anchovies on toasted bread, generously seasoned with oil, oregano, salt and pepper. A mere €2.50 for a delicious homemade lunch!

After a rest at the B&B, we headed to San Vito Lo Capo for dinner. This is the trendiest place in the area and the most popular with young people for its nightlife. The beach in San Vito is often compared to the Caribbean because of the whiteness of its sand. In the last week of September, each year since 1998, the Couscous Fest takes place in the centre of the town. Chefs from all over the world come here to cook original recipes of couscous in front of the public while a technical jury and a popular jury both enjoy the food and vote for the best chef. Every night, in the main square, live music and free shows entertain the locals and the tourists. Unfortunately, we were not there for the Couscous Fest but we were lucky enough to experience a preview and savour many tasty recipes.

The next day the weather was a bit cloudy, so we opted to visit Trapani and then get the ferry to the island of Favignana. We spent a couple of hours walking around Trapani's pretty historical centre, along the elegant Corso Vittorio Emanuele and then to the beautiful Via Garibaldi with its baroque *palazzi*, magnificent *vill*e and churches. The piazza has an imposing statue dedicated to Giuseppe Garibaldi, a man considered to be one of the fathers of Italy. The pretty town of Marsala, not too far from here, is where the famous Italian general

chose to land with his Thousand Men to begin his unification of Italy.

After an aperitif in the square, we headed to the fish market, a great place to meet lively locals busy bartering for fish. The market, the boats in the harbour, the vendors cleaning the fish and the seagulls flying around trying to grab some fish create a very vivid picture.

We then took the ferry to Favignana. The best way to explore the island is by bike, so as soon as we got off the ferry we rented them and cycled to the different bays. The further we cycled the quieter the beaches were, as the tourists tend to stop at Cala Rossa, the first one! Here, there were many sailboats docked not far from the beach, taking advantage of the clear water. The further bays, Cala Azzurra and Cala Rotonda, are equally stunning.

I highly recommend stopping at the *ristoro* at Cala Azzurra for lunch – Dario, the owner, prepares delicious salads with fresh tuna and is super friendly. He runs his business truly out of love for the place and the people. After saying goodbye to Dario, we cycled further and got to the centre of the island where there are a few local shops and a small harbour which is home to one of the few surviving *tonnare* (tuna fisheries).

On the fifth day we decided to do some exercise and walk along one of the paths of the Zingaro Nature Reserve. Famous worldwide for its beautiful sea and coastline, the reserve offers seven miles of protected nature stretching along the coast between Scopello and San Vito Lo Capo with





Overlooking the port of Trapani



The beach at the Zingaro nature reserve

many small bays where you can swim and sunbathe. This area of some 4,076 acres presents a rich variety of flora and fauna and has several paths with varying levels of difficulty for the walker or, in some cases, hiker. We opted, of course, for the easiest one – though I must confess it was not as easy as I thought it would be! This was partly because of my not-so-sporty nature, coupled with all the eating we had enjoyed... But actually it was mainly due to the heat, as the sun was so bright and there is not much shade. Despite this it was definitely worth doing and I would do it again a million times over for the gorgeous views and peaceful pebbly beaches.

The last two days of our holiday were spent just relaxing – having perfect breakfasts on the terrace of our B&B, lying on the beach in Macari and going for dinner in the nearby restaurant Azzurra Makari where, while admiring the sunset, we enjoyed some of the freshest fish served by the friendly Mario and his team.

After this dream week I have even more fantastic memories and an even bigger desire to go back to this sunny island with its beautiful beaches, great food and the very friendly Sicilian people I met along the way. ■



Flora in the nature reserve



San Vito Lo Capo



La Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro

## GETTING THERE

### ► BY PLANE

The best airport to get to is Trapani, right up in the northwest tip of the island. Unfortunately, however, there are no longer any direct flights to Trapani from the UK. If you fly to Palermo it will take you a couple of hours at most to drive to the northwest coast.



# Porphyry. Purple is the new black

*The ancient Romans exploited the stone and used it as an important element of display and status for the elite*

PORPHYRY, A PURPLE STONE WITH WHITE FLECKS, was one of the big Renaissance status symbols. As in ancient Rome, porphyry was synonymous with power, nobility and the highest social rank. The etymology of porphyry is from the Greek word 'purple' and this particular type of purple-coloured stone, laden with so much symbolism, hails from one place only, Mons Porphrites, located in the Egyptian desert. The ancient Egyptians had used it during the Ptolemaic period but not extensively, as it is harder than all other stone and so difficult to quarry, and almost impossible for them to carve. It was the Ancient Romans who exploited the stone and used it as an important element of display and status for the elite. Why?

First and foremost, it was the stone's colour, already with strong connotations of luxury and wealth. The Romans used the stone for their tombs, temples and prestigious structures. Purple became the colour of the most wealthy and the colour associated with the highest ranking in the government (consuls and senators). Purple dye was created from a mollusc found in Tyre, a city on the Mediterranean (located in modern day Lebanon) and it took thousands of these small critters to create the smallest quantity of dye. Consequently, the dye cost a fortune and only the extreme wealthy could afford to think of having an item of clothing of this hue.

Secondly, great skill was required to carve the stone due to its unbelievable hardness. It was harder than the tools they had for stone, and so it required great virtuosity on behalf of the workshop to manipulate the material. This rarity of ability and skill in the carving of the stone made any sculpture, carved with detail, an object of great wonder and prestige.

Lastly, it was a reminder of the greatness of Rome. Imported from a conquered land, Egypt, the stone reminded Romans of their supremacy over powerful and sophisticated kingdoms such as Egypt.

Ferrucci's Statue of Justice in Florence's Piazza Santa Trinita



An ancient she-wolf sculpture



Cosimo II de' Medici



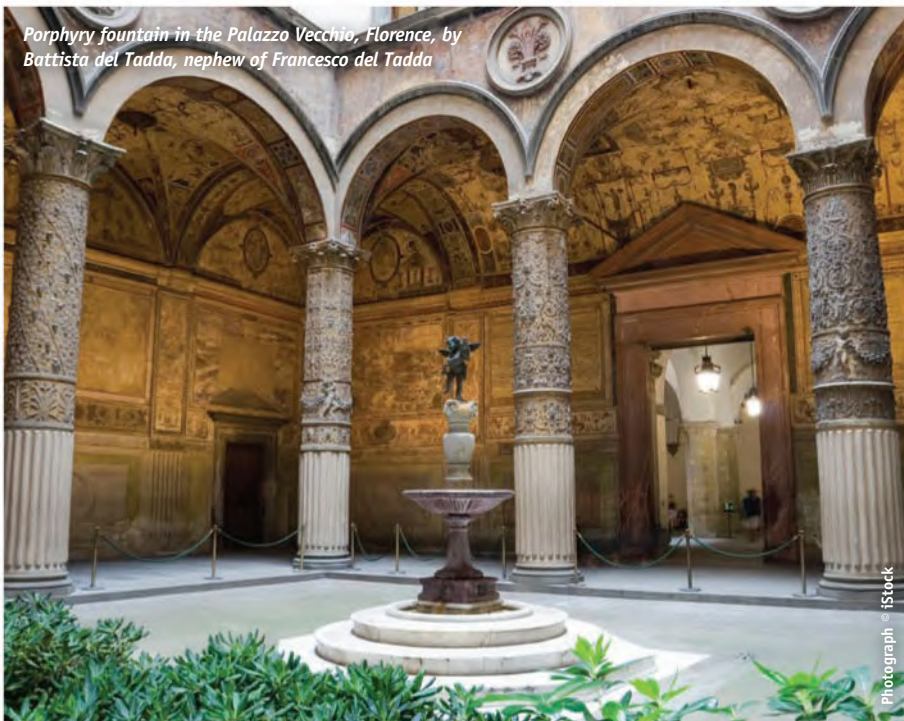


*The Tetrarchs at St Mark's Basilica in Venice*

By the 5th century AD the location for the quarry had been lost. But in Italy in the 15th century, with the revival of all things classical, porphyry made a comeback in a big way. The symbolism of the ancient stone was used to convey modern claims to power in the city states, as seen by its use in the floor decoration (mid 1400s) in the private chapel of the Medici family in their Palazzo Medici-Riccardi. The use of porphyry here alluded to their cryptomarchy of the republic of Florence: the Medici were announcing that they were the unofficial kings of the republic.

It was also used in Christian symbolism, as the colour of the stone was reminiscent of the blood of Christ and his Passion. Ancient sarcophagi were remodelled as altar fronts, or the stone was used as markers to designate important sites (St Peter's in Rome is abundant in this!). Just as the Romans had used it as a symbol of supremacy of civilisation, so too did the Venetians, with the Tetrarchs proudly inserted into the façade of St Mark's Basilica. This was part of the spoils from Constantinople after the sacking of that city in 1204. Just as the Romans had conquered the Egyptians, so too had the great Venetian Empire conquered that of the Eastern Roman Empire and become the undisputed primary force on the Mediterranean Sea.

Not knowing the quarry's location meant that all porphyry worked in the Renaissance period was remodelled from an existing Ancient Roman object. Much to their frustration, due to the stone's hardness, they couldn't achieve the same detail and finesse that the Ancients had produced. They were able to cut the stone but not work it well. Francesco Ferrucci, *detto del Tadda*, Florentine sculptor of the late 1500s, was the first to be able to really carve a statue of importance and artistry. His impressive 'Justice' overlooks the Piazza Santa Trinita in Florence, from the top of an Ancient Roman column. She took twelve years to carve; the stone had been given as a gift to the Grand Duke Cosimo I de Medici from the Pope. Del Tadda became a Florentine court sculptor and this great feat was extremely important, symbolically representing the great innovation in all areas of the arts and sciences in the flourishing court under Cosimo I. ■



*Porphyry fountain in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, by Battista del Tadda, nephew of Francesco del Tadda*

Photograph © iStock



**ABOUT THE WRITER**  
FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at [www.freyasflorence.com](http://www.freyasflorence.com)

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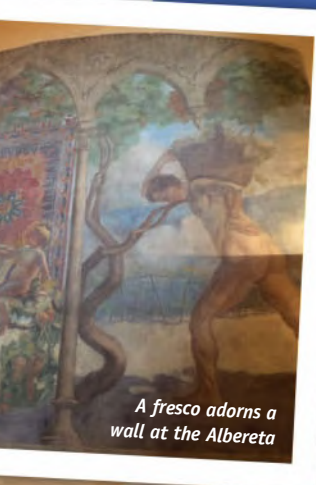


Media Ref: ITAL115



# FRANCIACORTA & LAKE ISEO

Lake Iseo in Lombardy is a little gem. Smaller and less well-known than Lake Garda, and with the added bonus of the Franciacorta sparkling wine region to the south. **Lorenza Bacino** explores what there is to see and do in the area...



*A fresco adorns a wall at the Albereta*



*Contemporary design in the hotel's dining room*

The road snakes steeply upwards towards the village of Erbusco, a few kilometres south of Lake Iseo. I'm in the Franciacorta wine region and I'm trying to find my hotel for the night. So far it eludes me.

Then, slowly, as I ease around a final curve, a wonderful villa atop a secluded hill reveals itself – surrounded by vineyards, ivy-covered façades and turrets draped in sunshine and lilac wisteria. The sound of buzzy bees and the scent of wisteria drape like a mantle around my shoulders. I've arrived at L'Albereta – a 19th-century former

family home and now a five-star Relais & Châteaux hotel.

Inside, L'Albereta ([www.albereta.it](http://www.albereta.it)) is a labyrinth of contemporary design and elegance; an idyllic and tranquil setting with 38 rooms and a Henri Chenot spa and wellness centre. There are tennis courts, an indoor heated pool and a jacuzzi, with horse-riding facilities and golf but a stone's throw away. It's also a place to enjoy excellent food and the local Franciacorta wine.

No two rooms are decorated in the same way. The prevailing tones are warm – terracotta, pale greens and yellows – and some rooms are decorated with frescoes





## WHERE TO EAT AND STAY

### RISTORANTE ZU

Via XXV Aprile, Riva di Solto, Lago d'Iseo

☎ +39 035 986004

[www.ristorantezu.it](http://www.ristorantezu.it)

Elegant lakeside location specialising in traditional local cuisine, especially fish.

### RISTORANTE PANORAMICO A FONTENO

Via Palazzine, 30 – Fonteno

☎ +39 035 969027

[www.panoramicohotel.com/en](http://www.panoramicohotel.com/en)

Panoramic location with traditional cuisine.

### AGRITURISMO EL GIARDÌ

Via Monte Marone, 9 – Marone

☎ +39 030 982 7400

☎ +39 328 355 2235

[www.elgiardi.it](http://www.elgiardi.it)

Hillside restaurant with lake view.

### LA SPIAGGETTA A MONTE ISOLA

Via Sensole, 26 – Monteisola

☎ +39 030 988 6141

[www.trattorialaspiaggetta.it](http://www.trattorialaspiaggetta.it)

Lake specialities.

### RELAIS FRANCIACORTA

Via Manzoni, 29

– Colombaro di Corte Franca

☎ +39 030 988 4234

[www.relaisfranciacorta.it/en/hotel.aspx](http://www.relaisfranciacorta.it/en/hotel.aspx)

Gorgeous, typical Franciacorta-style villa/hotel. Would be a great location for weddings or special events.

### HOTEL RIVALAGO

Via Luigi Cadorna, 7 – Sulzano

☎ +39 030 985011

[www.rivalago.it](http://www.rivalago.it)

Recently renovated, with beautiful lakeside location and outdoor pool.

### ARABA FENICE HOTEL

Via Fenice, 4, – Iseo

☎ +39 030 982 2004

[www.arabafenicehotel.it/en](http://www.arabafenicehotel.it/en)

Romantic lakeside location, with views over Monte Isola.

## MARKETS

➤ If you enjoy bargain hunting and trying local produce, there are several weekly markets around Iseo and Franciacorta. Here are a list of the main ones, but do check as they may vary from season to season.

Rovato – Monday  
Sulzano – Tuesday  
Corte Franca – Wednesday  
Sarnico – Thursday  
Capriolo – Friday  
Iseo – Friday  
Erbusco – Friday  
Brescia – Saturday

depicting stories from times gone by. Bathrooms are cream or rose-coloured marble, and verandas jut out into the surrounding magnolia-filled botanical gardens.

Relaxing on the deck, sampling a glass of the local sparkle, I'm enveloped in lush greenery, and the blue gem that is Lake Iseo twinkles in the distance.

### BUBBLY IN FRANCIACORTA

The Franciacorta wine growing region extends southwards from the shores of Lake Iseo and stretches eastwards for 25km from the Oglio River, which flows out

from the lake, to the Mella River valley and the western suburbs of the city of Brescia. It's an area covering 18,000 hectares or so, and although it has long been relatively well-known in Italy, the Franciacorta label is beginning to gain a reputation abroad too.

In 1995, it was the first Italian sparkling wine to receive the highest accolade (DOCG) classification, the only other being French champagne. And Lake Iseo itself plays a significant role in creating the ideal climate for this Italian 'champagne' – warm, sunny summer days and cool nights are essential,



Barone Pizzini, where the magic happens underground



with mild winters. This helps the chardonnay, pinot nero and pinot bianco grapes used in the production of Franciacorta to ripen easily.

This is a light and popular type of wine that can be enjoyed anywhere at any time. I enjoyed sampling some fizz at one of the oldest wineries in the area, Barone Pizzini ([www.baronepizzini.it](http://www.baronepizzini.it)), which prides itself on producing wines from only organically farmed grapes, with minimum environmental impact and maximum energy saving. They

can achieve this because two thirds of the building lies beneath the ground and uses a natural cooling system made from wood and stone. Barone Pizzini is a relatively small business, producing 300,000 bottles a year, most of which are exported to northern European countries. Here I learn that it takes two and a half years to produce Franciacorta. All the grapes are harvested in mid-August, by hand, to avoid any damage to the fruit.

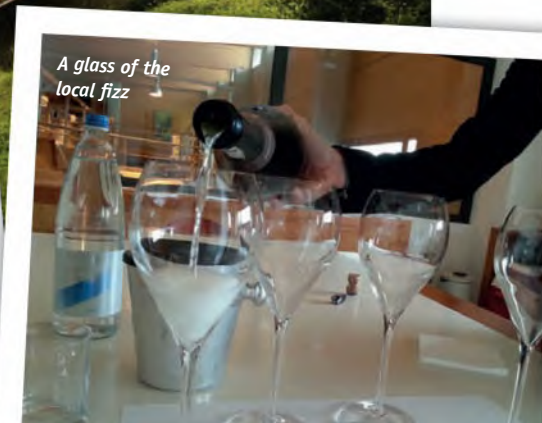
Gazing around outside the winery, I note that the hills are

low, dotted with abbeys, churches, monasteries and castles. I decide that it must be a perfect place to explore by bike.

#### LAKE ISEO BY BIKE

The lake is only 25km long and 4.5km wide. Soaring mountains lock it in and another small green body of land rises dramatically from its depths to the south, Monte Isola, an island in a lake that has about 2,000 inhabitants spread across 11 villages. Since cars aren't allowed on this 4sqm speck of land, I ask Flavio, of Iseo

*The Franciacorta wine growing region extends southwards from the shores of Lake Iseo and stretches eastwards for 25km from the Oglio River*



*A glass of the local fizz*





Romanino  
frescoes in  
Pisogne

## INFORMATION

- [www.agenzialagoiseofranciocorta.it](http://www.agenzialagoiseofranciocorta.it) and [www.agtiseofranciocorta.it](http://www.agtiseofranciocorta.it) for general tourist information
- [www.iseobike.com](http://www.iseobike.com) or email Flavio Tignonsini [info@iseobike.com](mailto:info@iseobike.com) cycling tours of the lake and Franciacorta area.
- Lorenza's trip to Lake Iseo was organised by Selective Travel Abroad, [www.selectivetravel.com](http://www.selectivetravel.com), a tour company specialising in Verona and the Lakes. Selective Travel Abroad can organise and arrange all transfers, hotel bookings and car hire for your trip.
- Lorenza was a guest at the five-star Relais & Chateaux L'Albereta. Check out the website [www.albereta.it](http://www.albereta.it) for more information on the Henri Chenot wellness and detox programmes. You can also enjoy swimming, tennis, yoga, horse-riding, plus excursions to the nearby wineries. There are also on site baby sitting facilities.

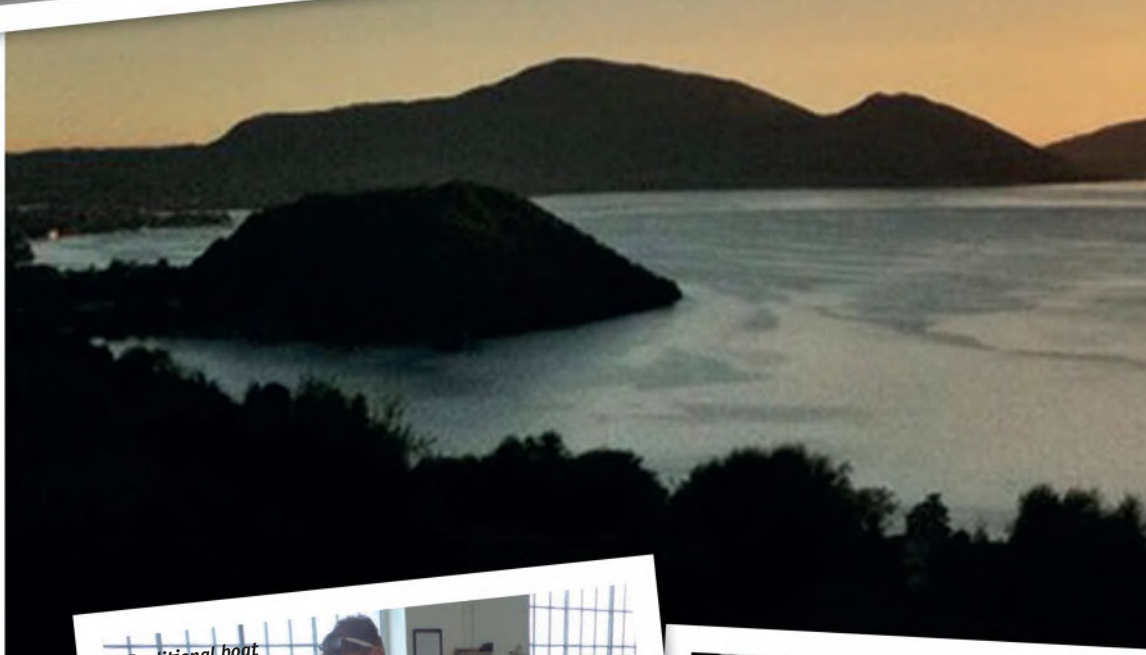
## GETTING THERE

- **BY PLANE**  
Return flight to Bergamo airport courtesy of Thomson Lakes and Mountains [www.thomsonlakes.co.uk](http://www.thomsonlakes.co.uk). It's a 40km drive from the airport to Lake Iseo.

Bike ([www.iseobike.com](http://www.iseobike.com)) to show me around. Between May and September is the ideal time weather-wise to explore, so I'm on track.

Flavio is a local certified mountain bike tour guide and knows Franciacorta like the back of his hand. He's also the owner of a hundred bikes and the sole renter around Lake Iseo. He can tailor-make trips for individuals, families and groups, varying in length and difficulty, taking in wineries, waterfalls, forests and hamlets. He can either accompany you or leave it up to you to explore. He also organises walking tours of Franciacorta and canoeing trips on the lake.

Time constraints mean I only have a morning to enjoy Monte Isola together with Flavio. Cycling around the island isn't a hard ride, with only a couple of hills leaving me shamefully out of breath! There are a handful of small hamlets





and villages on the island, and I was fascinated to watch the locals crafting their renowned homemade fishing nets. Surprisingly there is a small family boatbuilding business here too – [www.montisolabarche.it](http://www.montisolabarche.it) and they're more than happy to show you the boats they're working on if you're interested.

### THE TASTE TRAIN

If it's a more gentle experience you're after, why not try the Taste Train or Treno dei Saporì? ([www.trenodeisapori.it](http://www.trenodeisapori.it)). It departs twice a week as long as there are at least 50 people on board. Or you can hire it out exclusively for your group or for special events.

I enjoy a short guided tour of the quaint town of Iseo on market day, before joining my group at the railway station to board the train. It pootles along the lakeside at a leisurely pace, and we're immediately

invited to partake in an aperitif of, yes you've guessed it – the local Franciacorta sparkling wine. This is followed by typical cheeses and cold cuts, a seasonal first course, (polenta and wild mushrooms and ravioli with butter and sage in my case) dessert and grappa – if you can manage it, which isn't hard really as all you need do is sit, eat and enjoy the views of the lake as the train trundles along.

The stop-off at the village of Pisogne to the north of the lake is particularly memorable as we could admire the beautiful frescoes by Girolamo Romanino in the Santa Maria della Neve church. They are wonderfully expressive. We stop off at Sulzano on the way back, and take a five-minute boat ride over to Monte Isola (my second visit), only

this time I enjoy an ice cream at one of the lakeside cafés and just gaze at the surrounding beauty.

If you visit in September this year, Monte Isola will be awash with thousands of colourful paper flowers for the Festa di Santa Croce. It's in the village of Carzano and families have been preparing for years as the festival only takes place every five years and competition is fierce to see which family can produce the most beautiful displays. See [www.monteisola.eu](http://www.monteisola.eu) for more information. It promises to be quite dazzling. **!**



*There are a handful of small hamlets and villages on the island, and I was fascinated to watch the locals crafting their renowned homemade fishing nets*





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So, as we say in Italian, "*Ci vediamo presto!*" See you soon!



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# THE HIGH LIFE

Staying in Florence doesn't mean you have to be right in the middle of all the hustle and bustle. **Sarah Lindsay** discovers some alternative comforts at Riva Lofts...



Photograph © Daniela Marchi



Photograph © Daniela Marchi





**B**uilt in 1880 and set on the banks of the Arno river, this former old Florentine leather factory was acquired in 1999 by the renowned architect Claudio Nardi, who is responsible for the interior design in arguably the most fashionable shop in Florence – Luisaviaroma – and who for a number of years now has created interiors for the likes of Valentino and Dolce & Gabbana in New York and Milan.

Nardi occupied the site for six years, using it both as work and living quarters before he returned to the city centre. While he was there he decided to divide the formerly utilitarian space into nine self-contained studios ranging in size from 300 to 1,000 square feet. This is Riva Lofts.

In Riva Lofts, Nardi, with his hostess daughter Alice, has created a unique boutique accommodation, blending the modernity of a metropolitan city with the privacy and comforts of the domestic atmosphere. For the well-heeled traveller, Riva Lofts is one of the most contemporary and chic places to stay right now.

#### PALE PINK WALLS

The approach, tucked down a nondescript back street is quite unassuming; you could be forgiven if you were to bypass its entrance. However, once you step through the frosted glass gateway you enter into an oasis of calm: a courtyard framed by pale pink walls hidden behind climbing white roses oozes a sense of tranquility from the madness of the surrounding city.

The rooms are expansive with their double height ceilings and exposed beams – a nod to the building's history – coupled with a contemporary and creative interior design using warm tonal palettes offset with period pieces of furniture blended with a stylish mix of textiles.

All the stylish and stunningly fashionable studios are equipped with a discreet kitchenette designed by Claudio Nardi himself.

And there is a dining table should you wish to stay in and enjoy your surroundings rather than dine out in town.

Throughout this intimate complex, the juxtaposition of contemporary and period furnishings is continued using an interesting collection of recovered antiques and iconic 1950s pieces – my personal favourite pieces were the upcycled travelling trunks turned into wardrobe space.

Florence is a city drenched in history. It is with a relief that the hoteliers have decided to pursue their vision with one eye on the past whilst also looking towards the future.

#### CHIC AND SUBTLE

Loft number 4 offers fantastic views of the Arno river through its impressive, huge, church-like arched windows, while loft number 8 offers a private garden terrace.

The chic and subtle design is carried throughout the communal garden with a blend of clean, angular lines from the pool, where many a hot day's activities can be quenched. Rusty, reclaimed and re-loved garden tables are provided while you are enjoying a glass of wine, or you can unwind after the day's business on the sun loungers with the distant sound of the city on the breeze. Garden ornaments such as huge snail-like orbs double up as golden lights at night, making the outdoor space just as enchanting in the twilight and useable 24/7.

But the garden is not the only communal area: the open plan dining room and lounge set in the heart of the hotel boasts high vaulted ceilings showcasing the beautiful exposed brickwork a palimpsest of history as layered as the delicious pastries provided as part of the daily breakfast.

An 'honesty bar', open fireplace, cinema screen, well-stocked music collection and more handpicked vintage-style pieces of furniture are provided throughout the space, emphasising the homely feel whilst providing the opportunity to converse with your fellow travellers should you so wish.

The dining area is spacious yet intimate and can be hired for private dining and parties. Alternatively, the whole of the Riva Lofts can be hired out, and would lend itself perfectly for a big event with family and friends.

#### UNDER THE SKIN

Florence is one of the most vibrant cities in the world as such there are times the pulsating throng of tourists can be a little unbearable – this can also make it hard to get to under the skin of the city and feel its heart. With the vast majority of luxury city hotels based right in the centre it gives you no real reason to venture further, with all the attractions on your door step.

Riva Lofts' position, however, is such that it is no more than a 30-minute walk along the banks of the Arno, or a 15-minute cycle ride using one of the vintage-style bikes available to guests. And if you don't need the exercise, the incredibly convenient new tram line is a two-minute walk away (tickets are available from reception). Skirting the edge of the huge Cascine Park, it takes no more than five minutes to get to the centre of Florence.

Having a retreat away from the crowds and joining the locals in their tram commute or jogging along the Arno really helps you to tap into the Florentine community rather than following the well-trodden tourist routes. Picking up a copy of the local Anglo/American monthly newspaper left in your room tells you what's on in the local vicinity and gives you the opportunity to further explore this hip and fashion-conscious city.

If you are considering Florence as the city of choice for a long weekend, week or work trip then Riva Lofts offers a fantastic alternative choice for the discerning visitor. When I return I would like to bring some friends along and rent out the whole hotel. You had best get in before word gets out! ■

**RIVA LOFTS FLORENCE**  
Via Baccio Bandinelli, 98  
50142 Firenze, Italy  
☎ +39 055 713 0272  
www.rivalofts.com





Photograph © Daniela Marchi



Photograph © Daniela Marchi



Photograph © Daniela Marchi







1910 A.L.F.A 24 HP



1938 Alfa Romeo 8C 2900 B Lungo



1957 Alfa Romeo Giulietta TI



1970 Alfa Romeo Tipo 33/3



Andrea Bocelli at the reveal of the  
Alfa Romeo Giulia



# ALFA ROMEO

## *105 Years of Italian Style*

# GIULIA



Car writer and travel journalist **Richard Truesdell** spent two weeks in Italy examining this Italian icon's storied past, driving its present, and seeing its future in the guise of the new Giulia four-door sports saloon... ➤



The auditorium in the Alfa Romeo Museum in Arese, just outside of Milan, was dark. The atmosphere was electric, more like a movie premiere than a new car reveal, as Andrea Bocelli sang to more than 300 journalists and guests. To his side, as a curtain was drawn back, a compact red saloon, previously not seen, motored onto the stage to massive applause. The 2016 Alfa Romeo Giulia, a sports car about the size of a BMW M3, had broken cover. The future of Alfa Romeo, a marque on the decline for more than two decades, was on display for all to see.

Alfa Romeo had chosen wisely the location for the Giulia's reveal. Instead of an international automobile show, where it would have competed with a dozen similar reveals, the Italian icon had the world's attention all to itself. But beyond the reveal of the Giulia, why did the world's financial and automotive journalists make the pilgrimage to Arese? To answer that question all one has to do is take a walk through *Il Museo Storico Alfa Romeo*, where the company's proud 105-year heritage is back on display after four years' away.

## THE PAST

### MOTORSPORTS AND THE COACH BUILT ERA (1910-1954)

As you walk through the Alfa Romeo Museum, technical innovation is a constant theme, starting with the first car, the A.L.F.A. 24 HP in 1910. A.L.F.A., *Anonima Lombarda Fabbrica Automobili*, was born from the French-backed firm *Società Anonima Italiana Darracq* (SAID) and a group of Italian investors. Just a year later A.L.F.A. went racing, entering the famous Targa Florio race in Sicily.

The first hall of the Alfa Romeo Museum serves as the company's timeline, start to finish. When you move to the next hall, which displays many of its best-known concept cars, you'll find the 1914 A.L.F.A. 40/60 HP Aerodinamica, a car that looks something like a zeppelin on wheels but was actually one of the first instances of aerodynamics applied to automotive design.

The next hall, a series of dark displays, highlights some of the marque's best-known race cars, including its most famous early Grand Prix cars. Included in this group is the 1935 Alfa Romeo Bimotore Scuderia Ferrari, a twin-engined race car that is generally acknowledged as the first Ferrari. Also in this hall are many of the company's most successful post-war race cars, including several models of its Tipo 33 series from the 1960 and 1970s – some of the most beautiful sports racing cars ever built. For many years, it was acknowledged that Alfa Romeos had won more races than any other marque, (although today many believe that this title belongs to either Ferrari or Porsche).

From the hall of race cars one moves next to a group of road cars that best exemplifies Alfa Romeo in the 1930s, cars of advanced mechanical design combined with gorgeous coach-built bodies from coach-building houses like Touring and Zagato. The coach-built era, when manufacturers like Alfa Romeo provided the chassis and drive trains (engine, transmission, rear axle) to independent body builders, resulted in some of the most beautiful Alfa Romeos of all time, best exemplified by the 1938 Alfa Romeo 8C 2900 B Lungo. While it still sported the flowing, detached fenders of pre-war cars, you can clearly see the beginnings



1914 A.L.F.A. 40/60 HP Aerodinamica



1935 Alfa Romeo Bimotore Scuderia Ferrari



1950 Alfa Romeo 1900



2015, Alfa Romeo Museum



of the evolution to full envelope-style bodies that would define Alfa Romeos after World War Two (during which the company had provided war materials for the Italian military, including a series of aircraft engines based on British designs).

In the immediate post-war era, however, Alfa Romeo returned to the practice of supplying chassis to coach-builders, resulting in advanced and beautiful designs such as the stunning 1950 Alfa Romeo 6C 2500 Super Sport Villa d'Este. Though it was a limited-production road car, the body featured a full envelope-style body that was as modern as any car in the world at the time.

## THE PRESENT

### THE MASS PRODUCTION ERA (1950-PRESENT)

At the same time as the company was supplying the mechanical bones to the coach-builders, it was also going down a separate road with the introduction in 1950 of the Alfa Romeo 1900, a modern, compact saloon that could be mass-produced. It was the first Alfa Romeo to feature a combined body and frame (unibody) structure that is now a feature of virtually every modern production automobile.

The move to mass production accelerated in 1954 when Alfa Romeo introduced the Giulietta, a series of saloons, coupés and convertibles that personify Alfa Romeo's contribution to Italy's post-war economic miracle. The Giulietta heralded the company's Golden Era, when it exported cars around the world, especially to the US and UK. Noteworthy from the Giulietta series was the TI model, arguably the world's first modern sports four-seater, a title often associated with BMW's 2002, introduced more than a decade later.

Throughout the 1960s the company grew rapidly, due in part to a series of open, affordable sports cars that included the Spider, also known as the 'Duetto', which gained worldwide fame in the 1967 movie *The Graduate*. When one thinks of a classic Alfa Romeo sports car, this is it: an automotive *dolce vita*.

While it had success with its sports cars, at the same time Alfa Romeo also produced a series of two- and four-door saloons with rear-wheel drive. Among the best known was the original Giulia, a boxy four-door effort which some liken to a flying phone booth but in reality was more aerodynamic than a (then) Porsche 911. Today, a Giulia is the least expensive way to enter the fraternity of classic Alfa Romeo ownership. It could be said that the marque lost its way in the years following the Giulia, when it started producing a series of cars featuring front-wheel drive, especially after the company was absorbed by Fiat in 1986 after years of financial difficulties. These challenges continue to the present where sales in 2013 totalled just 74,000 units, down from a recent peak of 208,336 in 1999.

Before attending the reveal of the Giulia, I used the previous week to visit Abruzzo. And what would be more appropriate than touring the region in a new Alfa Romeo? A call to my friends in the communications group at FCA in Auburn Hills, Michigan, meant I was able to arrange the loan of a new Alfa Romeo 4C sports car.

Of the three cars in Alfa Romeo's current line-up, the diminutive 4C is the only one that can stir the heart of a true *alfista* (as Alfa Romeo enthusiasts like to be known).

The 4C is tiny – think Lotus Elise – but wide. Because of its mid-engine design it suffers from poor visibility to the rear and limited luggage capacity. The challenge of room for luggage for two for a week on the road would be put to the test as my travel companion, Susan Convery, who I've known for 46 years since high school and often joins me on my overseas trips, would need to fit everything in the rear boot of less than four cubic feet. Soft-side luggage would be the order of the day: a black leather Tumi athletic bag for me, a Sarah Bradley satchel for Susan – my fully-stuffed backpack with camera and computer gear sharing the footwell with Susan's legs.

We planned to spend five days in Abruzzo. My plan was to film locations from the obscure 2010 George Clooney thriller *The American*, much of which is set in the region's northwest – Castel del Monte, Pacentro and Sulmona. Susan and I picked up our 4C in Milan, and it took a day's driving, with an overnight in Modena, to arrive in Abruzzo, our first stop being La Locanda Sul Lago in Santo Stefano. There our path would cross with my great friend Leonardo de Flaviis, whose culinary tour of Abruzzo was already in underway with a group of eight Americans. We learned the nuances of saffron as well as making pasta with a saffron sauce from scratch.

It was Leonardo who, prior to our arrival, had arranged an impromptu Alfa Romeo car show at the Agriturismo 'La Rustica', outside Pescara. The local owners' group, Alfa Club Val Vibrata, showed up with five classic Alfa Romeos, a 6C 2500 Villa d'Este, a Giulietta Sprint coupé, both from the 1950s, a Spider "Duetto" roadster from the 1960s, a 2000 Berlina from the 1970s and an SZ coupé from the 1980s. After the show we reconnected with Leonardo's group in Buccianico at the Cantin Arte, an olive oil museum, before lunch at Ristorante Ferrara, where we toured the wine cellar and sampled local cheeses, meats and wines.

The following day, after overnighting in one of our favourite places in Abruzzo, the spa Hotel Villa Danilo in Gamberale, we met up with Val Vibrata club president Matteo Di Nardo in L'Aquila to photograph and film our 4C with his 1960 Giulietta Spider, a car almost identical to the one driven by Edward Fox in the 1973 film *The Day of the Jackal*. Matteo brought along automotive cinematographer Davide Cironi, who



Alfa Romeo 4C



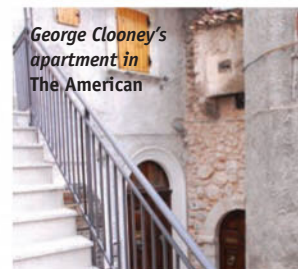
My travelling companion



At cooking school



Santo Stefano



George Clooney's apartment in *The American*



Buccianico





Alfa Romeos in L'Aquila



Packing the car



Impromptu car show



Car show at Agriturismo 'La Rustica'



1950 Alfa Romeo 6C Villa d'Este



The D'Alfonso family with the American group at Ristorante Ferrara

filmed the cars for his YouTube channel, The Davide Cironi Drive Experience. My next Alfa Romeo-themed adventure will be a trip from Genoa to Paris, retracing the route of Edward Fox's assassin in a classic Alfa Romeo Giulietta Spider. Maybe Matteo's. Should be fun!

### THE FUTURE

Finally it was time to return to Milan and the Giulia reveal in Arese on 24 June, 2015, Alfa Romeo's 105th birthday. In his comments to the assembled journalists, Chieti-born FCA CEO Sergio Marchionne had this to say: "The Giulia would not have been possible without the merger with Chrysler. It provided the necessary financial resources, the technical capability and a global distribution network." Insiders have reported that Marchionne personally vetoed an earlier design in late 2012, thus the crash two-year redesign that sent the small team of engineers back to the drawing boards for a totally different approach, delaying the car's launch.

The version that was revealed was the top-spec, BMW M3-fighting version, the Quadrifoglio (Cloverleaf) version. This model will feature an all-new, twin-turbo V6 developed in conjunction with Ferrari, producing an incredible 510hp. This will propel the Quadrifoglio version from 0 to 62mph in just 3.9 seconds. The engine block is forged from aluminium, part of an overall programme providing a class-leading power-to-weight ratio. This contributes to a 50/50 front-to-rear weight distribution.

While no other engine specifics were announced at the reveal, more mainstream Giulia models are expected to feature up to seven additional engines in the UK. These include a 2-litre, 4-cylinder petrol engine producing 178, 247 and 326hp. A 2.2-litre, 4-cylinder diesel producing 133, 178 or 207hp will most likely make up the vast majority of UK sales, with the mid-range 178hp version expected to be the most popular. And to complete the engine line-up, a 3-litre, 335hp V6 diesel will span the gap between the top 4-cylinder petrol version and the Ferrari-derived V6.

The interior is driver-centric, with all the controls directed to the driver. Great attention has been paid to the selection of materials in the interior. The surface materials promise to be premium on all models (at the reveal no interior photos were released so we were not given the opportunity to open the doors for a closer look) but with a sense of Italian style. All throughout the presentation and in the materials that accompanied the launch, Alfa Romeo's Harold Wester promised an alternative to soullessness of its Teutonic competitors.

When the first cars reach the UK next spring, expect them to be priced competitively to their German counterparts with the base four-cylinder models starting at under £25,000. For the full-spec Quadrifoglio version, expect prices to be comparable to an M3 or somewhere near £55,000.

If you would like to view all the Alfa Romeos currently on display in the Alfa Romeo Museum, visit the museum's website: [www.museoalfaromeo.com](http://www.museoalfaromeo.com) or view the selection of photos I took on my visit at: [bit.ly/2015AlfaRomeoMuseumVisit](http://bit.ly/2015AlfaRomeoMuseumVisit) ■

## THINGS TO SEE AND DO

### ALFA ROMEO UK

[www.alfaromeo.co.uk](http://www.alfaromeo.co.uk)

Find a dealer, request a quote, book a test drive, sign up for the newsletter.

### ALFA ROMEO MUSEUM – MUSEO STORICO ALFA ROMEO

Viale Alfa Romeo

Arese, Milan

[info@museoalfaromeo.com](mailto:info@museoalfaromeo.com)

[www.museoalfaromeo.com](http://www.museoalfaromeo.com)

Inaugurated in 1976, the museum was closed in 2011 but has reopened this year. Avail yourself of 105 years of Alfa Romeo history, and the chance to see lots of very beautiful cars.

### PHOTO TOUR OF THE MUSEO STORICO ALFA ROMEO

[bit.ly/2015AlfaRomeoMuseumVisit](http://bit.ly/2015AlfaRomeoMuseumVisit)

The author's own collection.

### ALFA CLUB VAL VIBRATA

[www.alfaclubvv.it](http://www.alfaclubvv.it)

Meet Matteo Di Nardo's group of *alfisti* in Abruzzo.

### ABRUZZO CULINARY TOURS

[Hello@Abruzzo1.com](mailto>Hello@Abruzzo1.com)

[www.abruzzo1.com](http://www.abruzzo1.com)

Authentic Abruzzo, authentic Italy.

## WHERE TO EAT AND STAY

### LA LOCANDA SUL LAGO

Via del Lago snc

67020 S. Stefano di Sessanio

☎ +39 0862 899019

[www.lalocandasullago.it](http://www.lalocandasullago.it)

Ristorante/Bed & Breakfast on the outskirts of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### AGRITURISMO 'LA RUSTICA'

Castellana di Pianella, Pescara

☎ +39 085 9771650

[www.agriturismolarustica.com](http://www.agriturismolarustica.com)

Where we met the Alfa Club Val Vibrata...

### CANTIN ARTE

Via San Camillo, 21 – Buchianico

☎ +39 0871 575427

[www.cantinarte.com](http://www.cantinarte.com)

Working *azienda agricola* with olive oil and wine museums attached.

### RISTORANTE FERRARA

Via Orientale, 39 – Buchianico

☎ +39 0871 381 1324

[www.ristoranteferrara.it](http://www.ristoranteferrara.it)

To enjoy a lunch of local cheeses, meats and wines.

### HOTEL VILLA DANILO

Contrada Stazione, 1 – Gamberale

☎ +39 0872 946220

[www.villadanilo.it](http://www.villadanilo.it)

Spa hotel in Chieti.



# Building the Dream

The builders have returned from their summer holidays and **Jane Smith** has set them to work on finalising the external plumbing arrangements and connected heating systems...



Jane Smith runs an estate agency in Le Marche: [www.magicmarche.com](http://www.magicmarche.com). You can contact Jane at: [jane@magicmarche.com](mailto:jane@magicmarche.com). Her husband, Richard, runs a restoration management company: [www.smithpropertyconsultancy.com](http://www.smithpropertyconsultancy.com). You can contact Richard at: [richard@smithprops.com](mailto:richard@smithprops.com)

The vines were full of succulent grapes and the landscape looked beautiful. It was September, my favourite month, and our team was back on track after a month off to recharge their energies. Giovanni, our *scavatore* (the man with the digger) commenced work on the drainage around the house exterior. Now that the house had its surrounding concrete walkway, alongside it Giovanni could dig all the drainage channels for the soil pipes, waste water and rain water evacuation. All the small tubes which exited the bathrooms and kitchen had been laid under the walkway by our builders and Giovanni needed to put a tube system in place to link them and to take the waste away into one huge septic tank which was buried in our field. He is a maestro with the digger, and just one week later everything was finished and the soil perfectly replaced.

Meanwhile, inside the house, the underfloor heating system was being laid by Smurf (the plumber). Over 2km of flexible hot water tubing wound its way around the black plastic 'carrier carpet' (see photo top right). This was then covered with a layer of light cement. Floor tiles would then go on top. Every room would have heating which would be mainly powered by a *termocamino* in the kitchen (a glass-fronted wood burning fire linked to a massive hot water tank). This wonderful thing is rather like an Aga in that it has become the glowing centre of the kitchen in winter; you can even barbecue on it.

We also placed two large solar panels in a field above the house (we are not fans of panels on house roofs) to

supply our house hot water. Our builder created the concrete platform for the panels and Smurf ran the relevant tubing. Even in winter, as long as the sun shone, we would get a good supply of hot water. As an emergency stand-by, we also had a gas boiler fitted. While we were laying the drainage outside, we also laid pipes from the solar panels to the pool so that we could extend the 'pool season' by one month either side of the summer. (All pretty 'eco'.)

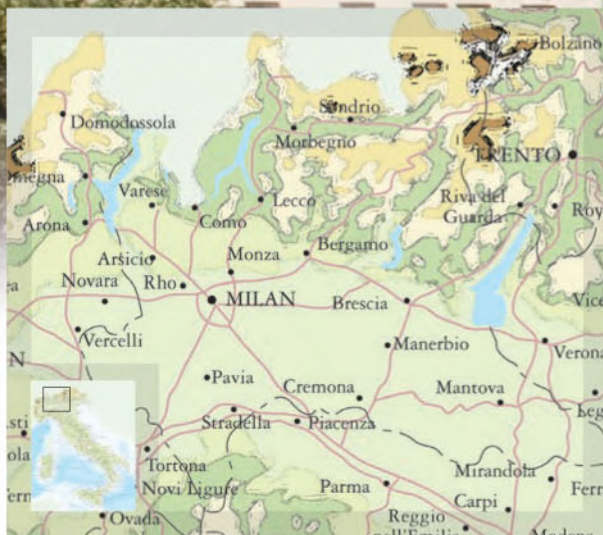
This month our 27 windows arrived too. We had chosen hardwood-framed double-glazed windows, traditionally made by a local craftsman and painted a soft blue/grey. This is a traditional colour for country house windows in Le Marche and it makes the house blend into its environment exceptionally well. We chose to have all the bathroom windows on a tilting mechanism, to enable ingress of air without compromising the house security. We would soon have external doors to match, but these wouldn't be fitted until the floors were laid.

Finally, we also had two staircases made and could finally dispense with the two ladders to the upper floors! This also allowed the builder to install three Velux windows in the loft space that would become our office, with a grand view of the Sibillini mountains and valleys.

The whole team worked tirelessly throughout September; knowing that we intended to move back into the house by mid-November was a huge motivator. Would we achieve this? My next two instalments will give you the answer! ■



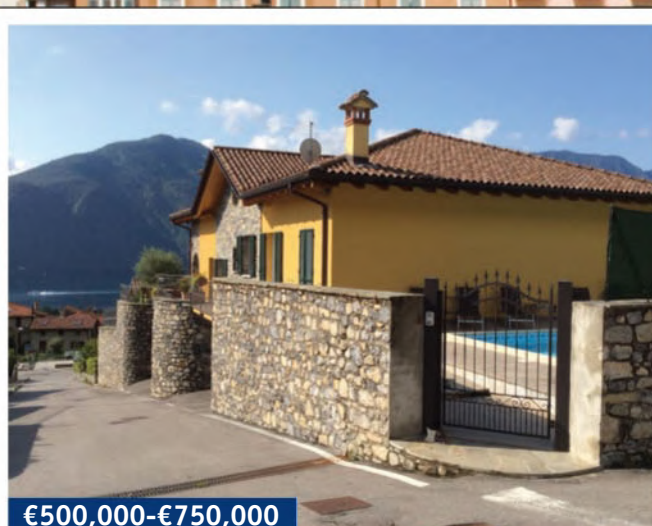




# THE LAKES

## PROPERTY FOCUS

Italy's northern lakes have always been desirable for property investors, and the exchange rate is currently highly favourable for British buyers...



€500,000-€750,000

### TREMEZZO

4 bed semi-detached villa of recent construction, but with a traditional look, in one of the nicest areas of Lake Como, with lake views, pool shared with only one other property. Accommodation over three floors, all with independent access, plus basement as follows. Basement: Large double garage with internal access to all floors. Ground floor: Large living room with open plan kitchen, covered portico leading to private garden, two bedrooms and bathroom. First floor: Studio apartment with bathroom and balcony with lake view. Second floor: Loft bedroom with bathroom. The property is just 15 minutes walk from the shore of the lake and all amenities including public and lake transport. Ref: 3329

Price €565,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 [www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)

## LINDA TRAVELLA

LINDA TRAVELLA, DIRECTOR OF CASA TRAVELLA LTD, HAS BEEN SELLING PROPERTY IN ITALY FOR 26 YEARS



The northern lakes have so much to offer, says Linda Travella of Casa Travella, who has been selling Italian property for 26 years. You have a mixture of charm, sophistication, stunning views... Travelling there is easy and with the euro weak against the pound, property is fantastic value right now. This is an excellent area to buy a property as it is central to many other European cities and has a very good choice of apartments in wonderful villas that grace the shoreline and modern, light,

new-build apartments that are very good as an investment for rental. Como/Maggiore are also perfect for sports enthusiasts of golf and skiing, and it is great for football fans as you can go and watch AC Milan or Inter Milan. Milan is a shopper's paradise too – try Via Monte Napoleone for some designer shopping, but take your credit card! Travelling to the lakes is easy with Milan's Malpensa and Linate, plus Bergamo and Verona airports. So you can fly from all parts of the UK, Europe and the world.

**Lake Como** – Join George Clooney and other famous names and own a home here, it is more affordable than you think! A two bedroom property with shared pool can be found for €145,000 (at the moment around £100,000!) The €100-200,000 market is very buoyant with a greater choice than ever before! Make a choice – new build with pool, villa by the lake... Whatever you want. I feel sure we can find it! Detached villas start at around €500,000. There is a good choice of new build property at the moment too. These types of properties can make an excellent investment for rental. For value for money, look at the locations North of Menaggio, such as Gravedona or Pianello del Lario. You will always pay a premium for a lake view, but it is worth it!

**Lake Maggiore** – This is a perfect area to purchase your summer and winter property. From the stunning shores of Stresa, where you can see the magnificent Borromeo Islands and ski within an hour, the best value properties at the moment tend to be over €300,000. For the rental market this is a popular area and you can either choose a holiday rental property or something in the centre of Stresa that can be rented in the winter to business people working in Milan. There is a train service from Stresa to Milan. At Ginese, above Stresa, a two bedroom, two bath apartment with stunning pool with lake view costs €350,000. Detached villas start at around €500,000. What you may not know is that Lake Maggiore has numerous golf courses and there are in fact two very good golf courses within 30 minutes of Stresa.

**Lake Orta** – This small lake is close to Maggiore and offers a tranquil setting for those who live the 'quiet life'. Prices of property are higher here as there is not so much for sale. At Orta San Giulia, a three bedroom, three bathroom apartment in a stunning period villa is currently for sale at €1,300,000.

**Lake Garda** – The largest of the Italian lakes. The beautiful lakeside towns of Sirmione and Desenzano offer a selection of properties. Properties close to the lake will vary, from apartments or small villas in small developments with shared pools and easy access to the lake, to the larger modern villas. There is a good deal of new build on Garda and it is a very good area for a family, with Gardaland being a well known amusement park. Palatial villas with frontage onto the lake and moorings are less common here and their prices are high. You can find a property around Desenzano with a shared pool for about €180,000, but for anything with two bedrooms expect to pay €250,000. Property on the lake and especially a lakeside property is always a good investment. They are hard to come by and always sought after. With the present economic climate clients are very keen to make sure they buy a property that is a safe investment.





€100,000-€250,000

### STAZZONA

Two bed detached house a five minute drive from Dongo on the northwestern shore of Lake Como. Accommodation over three floors as follows: Lower ground floor: two garages. Ground floor: Main entrance hall, two double bedrooms, bathroom and storage cupboard. First floor: Large living room with dining area and two doors which lead to the balcony running along the length of this floor with lake views, kitchen and bathroom. Upper floor: Covered roof terrace, loft area. The property benefits from central heating and has a large terraced garden. One of the garages had planning permission to convert into a further bedroom, and although lapsed, this permission could be applied for again. The property can be sold furnished. Ref: 3622  
 Price €200,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 [www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)



€250,000-€500,000

### ALTURE STRESA

This classic 3 bedroom stately detached villa lies in the Altura area of Stresa, with superb lake views. About 280sqm of accommodation over two floors as follows: Ground floor: Entrance hall, lounge, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, laundry room and covered terrace. First floor: Further lounge, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, further bathroom, study, and beautiful covered terrace. The property sits in about 1,000sqm of beautifully kept garden, and has a spacious garage with a large terrace on the roof. This is a large and beautifully maintained spacious villa which can be used as a single dwelling or for rental as two dwellings, each with its own private facilities. Ref: 3450  
 Price €500,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 [www.casatravella.com](http://www.casatravella.com)



€2,000,000-€2,500,000

### PRIVATE LAKE VIEW VILLA WITH POOL

More Como architect-designed off-plan villas with private pools. Just 200m from Argegno on the western shore of Lake Como, this exclusive development of only two villas enjoys a tranquil and panoramic location, surrounded by greenery, and offering superb panoramic views of the lake below, as well as the island of Comacina and Bellagio in the distance. The approach is via a private access road and each villa has its own individual infinity pool and garage. Finishes and internal layout can be tailored to the buyers individual requirements. Villa 1: four beds, five baths over three levels. Villa 2: three beds, three baths over three levels.  
 Price €2,472,000 Contact ☎ +39 348 410 8544  
[info@lakecomoproperties.com](mailto:info@lakecomoproperties.com) [www.lakecomoproperties.com](http://www.lakecomoproperties.com)



€2,000,000-€2,500,000

### 7 BEDROOM VILLA

Beautifully restored Liberty Villa built in Moltrasio stone dating from the early 1900s. Lake views and approx. 480sqm of house with over 1,800sqm of mature grounds and a stunning pool. Currently seven beds, four baths with room for extra bedrooms and bathrooms, as well as a roof terrace. There are two formal rooms on the ground floor – a spacious living room and an impressive dining room, both with parquet floors and original wooden, painted ceilings. The impressive hallway has a stunning marble staircase, leading to the first floor where there are four bedrooms and two further spacious marble bathrooms.  
 Price €2,300,000 Contact ☎ +39 348 410 8544  
[info@lakecomoproperties.com](mailto:info@lakecomoproperties.com) [www.lakecomoproperties.com](http://www.lakecomoproperties.com)





€200,000-€750,000

### SAN SIRO, LAKE COMO

Sitting immediately to the north of the very popular town of Menaggio, Terrazze al Lago is a small brand new development of high quality apartments built around a private lakefront piazza. All apartments offer excellent lake views and boat moorings available. There are just 15 apartments in four separate buildings, garage parking available and you have the option of a range of finishes to be able to personalise your apartment. The pricing is exceptionally attractive, delivering a high quality tranquil environment at prices which do not have the usual premium for being lake front. For those concerned with value it is undoubtedly an investment which shows an immediate capital appreciation. **Price €200,000-€680,000** **Contact ☎ 020 7692 7540** **info@ultissimo.com** **www.ultissimo.com**



€2500,000-€3000,000

### VALSOLDA, LAKE LUGANO

Villa Miralago sits in a sunny enclave of prestigious homes on the shores of the Italian part of Lake Lugano. It offers 660sqm over three floors with numerous terraces overlooking the lake. There is a comfortable garden around the property and a private shared lakefront area for swimming in the lake and boat mooring available. Immediately behind the villa are the mountains of Valsolda, perfect for mountain biking, hiking or running in breathtaking scenery. The villa offers a tranquil, sunny south-facing setting with wonderful lake views at only one-third of the price that you would pay for anything remotely comparable in Lugano. **Price €2,650,000** **Contact ☎ 020 7692 7540** **info@ultissimo.com** **www.ultissimo.com**



€500,000-€750,000

### RESTAURANT WITH 2 APARTMENTS NEBBIUNO, LAKE MAGGIORE

Exclusive and well known detached property comprising two apartments with 70 cover furnished restaurant on the ground floor. Ample parking and private garden. Ideal investment for restaurant or bed and breakfast. The property could be converted into a large residential home.

**Price €730,000**

**Contact ☎ 07 738 937 335**

**info@sallitaliproperties.com**

**www.sallitaliproperties.com**



### LARGE VILLA, RIVER TICINO, LAKE MAGGIORE

Constructed in 1908, this handsome and impressive villa enjoys views of the River Ticino, on Lake Maggiore. Boasting 619sqm of accommodation which includes seven bedrooms and six bathrooms, the villa stands within excellent gardens with swimming pool, garage and parking facilities. For those with boating interests, there is also mooring directly onto the river.

**Price upon application**

**Contact ☎ 07 738 937 335**

**info@sallitaliproperties.com**

**www.sallitaliproperties.com**



## LAKE COMO APARTMENT FOR SALE – €335,000



A smart, modern two-bedroom apartment in the popular and lively village of Argegno. It is a very short walk down to the main piazza with bars and restaurants and a main ferry stop on Lake Como. Fully furnished it is ready immediately.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT ULTISSIMO –  
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# LAKE COMO PROPERTIES

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GD, GUILDFORD

### CONTACT

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# IL PRATO DELLA VALLE

If this image looks familiar it is because we visited Padua's 'meadow without grass' in June. Unfortunately, we barely had time to stop then, so this month we return, under cover of darkness, to see it at its most splendid...

**W**e visited *Il Prato della Valle* when we spent 48 Hours in Padua earlier this summer. Our Venetian correspondent Sara Scarpa, you will recall, was quite taken with this often-overlooked city just 25 minutes from her home town and, finding so many things to see and do in her weekend there, barely had time to enjoy Italy's largest *piazza* – beyond, that is, taking the photo we published

on page 45 of that issue. The view you see here is of the canal, lined with statues, that encircles the oval park, *l'Isola Memmia*, at the centre of the piazza. American readers, by the way, will be interested to learn that, when it comes to public parks, it's the Europeans who do it big. Chicago's Millennium Park is slightly larger, but there is no other park in the USA anywhere near the size, though there are several in Europe, including one in sleepy old Cambridge, England. ■





# A Return to Tuscany

**Chris Allsop** last visited Tuscany as a young boy. Thirty years later he decided to go back...

**T**he last time I was in Tuscany, I mostly chased pigeons. I was six, on a family holiday, and the astounding art heritage of Florence was no match for the challenge of putting the wind up every pigeon in the city.

Since then, I'd poked around the edges but hadn't returned. Maybe because of what a name it's become – supreme in the British Italo-consciousness, summarised by that brochure-perfect image of a column of cypresses marching directly to the door of a stone farmhouse. Picturesque, certainly, but also... static? empty?

It was time to return, to discover if Tuscany could match the easy going of Puglia; the cuisine of Piedmont; the rustic charm of neighbouring Le Marche. The only fair way to judge was to let the region put its best foot forward. Come on, Tuscany, show me what you've got!



*Top bar: Viareggio (right); Lucca (p66); Florence (p67); Siena (p68); Chianti (p69). Clockwise from above: Remnants of Viareggio's original boardwalk; Viareggio café; the southern end of the boardwalk; view from the terrace of the Hotel Plaza e de Russie*







Photograph: iStock



## VIAREGGIO

My trip began on Tuscany's picturesque coast, fleeing the flat heat pressing down upon Pisa's airport. Viareggio, part of a strip of coastline known as Versilia, is reached after a half-hour drive that slants through the verdant foothills of the Apuan Alps. It's popular with Florentines (one hour's drive), and famous for its building of satirical floats for *Carnevale*.

First impressions of Viareggio, with its striped umbrellas parading along a goodly portion of the resort's 30 kilometres of yellow sand beach, suggest an Italian seaside cliché. However elegant surprises (besides those in Max Mara's windows) are thrown up as I stroll to the southern end of the promenade.

Founded in the 18th century, a number of art-nouveau façades still remain from Viareggio's exalted past. The twin-domed Gran Caffè Margherita is the grandest of these. Still open for business, with an exquisite period interior, the Margherita was famous as an artist's hangout, with the composer Puccini its most famous coffee-sipping customer.

Viareggio has another, more grisly artistic connection: the drowned poet Shelley washed ashore here after his boat was destroyed in a storm. Later on, I notice a Shelley pizza on the menu at a backstreet *ristorante*. Toppings: tuna and onions.

Also at the southern end, you'll find the other engine of Viareggio's economy: a superyacht shipyard. During my stay, several Bond-villain sized cruisers cut a swathe through the calm ocean, perhaps heading for the higher end, Russian-magnet Forte dei Marmi to the north. When I head in that direction, I find Viareggio's boardwalk becoming more modern. There's a southern Californian vibe here, with phalanxes of Italian joggers cruising sweatless at sunset, like off-duty Avengers. In the spaces between the casual yet chic restaurants and cafes spilling across the spacious walkway, I spot fishermen wading hip high in the breakers with their nets, catching fresh seafood for the kitchens. There aren't any period buildings this end, but I don't mind; the warm sea breeze is infused with jasmine and the gorgeous mountain views offer an appealing natural alternative.



Photography: Chris Allsop unless otherwise stated



## LUCCA

After a twenty-minute drive from Viareggio, past forested hills and small towns, I arrive at the walled city of Lucca. Enclosed within massive and intact medieval walls, Lucca was made into one of the richest cities in Tuscany by its canny merchant class. Apparently, the Lucchesi to this day introduce themselves according to whether they are “*Lucchesi dentro le mura*” (born inside the walls and therefore of noble lineage) or “*Lucchesi fuori le mura*” (new money from outside the walls).

While you'll find a maze of unusual churches, high-end boutiques and inviting cafés at ground level, Lucca saves its best for slightly higher up. I hire a bike and cycle along the top of the wide medieval walls. Small, shady parks coalesce in the corners of these graceful fortifications, where locals play chess, work on laptops, or profess passionate declarations of undying amour, no matter how many families are picnicking nearby.

The symbol of Lucca is its fairytale Guinigi Tower, its square red-brick construction capped with a small grove of trees like a thick head of hair. I hike its stairs (entry is only a few euros), and the panoramic views over the city and the surrounding countryside are easily worth it. In a church somewhere beneath, a choir is practising, their powerful choral voices ringing out beneath the blue sky.

I could spend my whole few days here, exploring Lucca's alleys and piazzas, reposing in its parks. But Tuscany doesn't resemble its idealised self yet. Between Lucca and Viareggio, I see hints, but not its fulfilment. Travel south, I am told.



From top: Quiet street in Lucca; locals working and playing on the walls in Lucca; view from Lucca's Guinigi Tower





## FLORENCE

**T**his is a quiet day," said our diminutive guide, Francesca. We pushed through the throng of tourists gathered beside the street market, the smell of leather engulfing us from the ranks of bags and belts strung into a colourful wall. Francesca tells me that Tom Hanks was in the city yesterday filming the latest Dan Brown. Small mercies, I think – if there's one thing Florence doesn't need it's another tourist attraction.

It's reckoned that, on an average day in the Tuscan capital, you have twenty tourists for every citizen. There are certainly moments, such as on the remarkable Ponte Vecchio (the only medieval bridge not destroyed by the Germans in WWII), when I'm yearning to employ the elevated Vasari's Corridor to escape, to just be able to string three footsteps together without obstruction (Francesca recommends October, which has had stunning weather in recent years, for those who don't enjoy crowds).

But I adjust, with the aid of the peerless surroundings. Florence is like a cultural Himalayas: there's always another architectural marvel peeping above the last, or the next art treasure waiting around the corner. It's endlessly transfixing. While I'm sure they are still there, I couldn't tell you, hand on heart, if Florence currently has pigeons still to chase.

Our tour ended, as many do, before the immense, graceful Duomo with its white, green and pink marble softening the midday sun. Later we see it from above (from Piazzale Michelangelo), the architect Brunelleschi's innovative self-supporting dome buoyant as a fishing float in a red-tiled sea.



From top: White-helmeted policeman in Florence; the Duomo from Piazzale Michelangelo; artists sketching in the Uffizi beneath Machiavelli; the Ponte Vecchio

## WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

### GRAND HOTEL PRINCIPE DI PIEMONTE

*Piazza Giacomo Puccini, 1 – Viareggio*

☎ +39 0584 4011

[www.principedipiemonte.com](http://www.principedipiemonte.com)

Grand and glamorous with four floors of themed rooms, many with ocean view balconies. A rooftop pool is the crowning glory, and the fascist dimensions of the dining room ensure a substantial breakfast buffet. Two restaurants, one serving a traditional Tuscan menu, the other the only two-star Michelin for miles.

### HOTEL PLAZA E DE RUSSIE, VIAREGGIO

*Piazza Massimo D'Azeglio, 1 – Viareggio*

☎ +39 0584 44449

[www.plazaederussie.com/hotel-in-viareggio](http://www.plazaederussie.com/hotel-in-viareggio)

A historic hotel positioned towards the southern end of the boardwalk, the Plaza e De Russie's old world terrace restaurant is one of the best places to eat in town. Look out for the regional tomato and fish *cacciucco* – umami loveliness paired with fresh, lightly seared shrimp.

### L'OCA

*Via Coppino, 409 – Viareggio*

☎ +39 0584 166 1661

[www.ristoranteloca.it](http://www.ristoranteloca.it)

Upmarket yet down-to-earth, this family-run restaurant is intriguingly positioned beside the superyacht shipyard. The husband is the sommelier, pairing wines for well-executed dishes. The ravioli stuffed with burrata and covered in a lobster sauce was particularly memorable, as was having a superyacht roll past the first floor restaurant's windows during dessert.

### GRAND HOTEL BAGLIONI, FLORENCE

*Piazza dell'Unità Italiana, 6 – Firenze*

☎ +39 055 23580

[www.hotelbaglioni.it](http://www.hotelbaglioni.it)

Rise above the tourist *melée* at the fabulous Brunelleschi Terrace restaurant at the Grand Hotel Baglioni. Super busy at breakfast, but a lot calmer at lunch. The traditional Tuscan menu is nearly as spectacular as the panoramic views over the city.

### CASTEL MONASTERO RESORT & SPA TUSCANY

*Monastero D'Ombone, 19*

*Castelnuovo Berardenga*

☎ +39 0577 570570

[www.castelmonastero.com](http://www.castelmonastero.com)

Luxury in an 11th century monastery in textbook Tuscan countryside. Expect the best and you won't be disappointed, from the infinity pool to the tastefully opulent rooms and professional staff. The two restaurants are also superb, with local farmers supplying fresh produce, the previous owner even vinifies a signature Chianti Classico for the hotel.



## SIENA

**W**e travel south to Florence's historic rival, Siena, passing through a softly contoured agricultural landscape. Soft grasses wave tantalisingly from the roadside, inviting us to pull over and wander barefoot. Tuscany the image is coming into focus.

Siena is smaller, gothic, and beautifully arranged over a hill that was once a lump on an ancient sea floor. I wander into the Basilica of San Domenico and stare at the grisly head of St Catharine on display. I'm told that someone offered €4 million for a local's modestly-sized apartment, with admittedly spectacular views of the old town (they didn't sell). The sense of belonging is strong here, made world famous through the city's fractious *palio* horse race, where Siena's 17 neighbourhoods (or *contrade*) vie, twice a year, for supremacy. A Sardinian who grew up here tells me that she, "watched as two girls, best friends from different *contrade*, did not speak to each other for the entire week leading up to the race". It happens, year in and year out. And through it all St Catharine never sleeps.

I walk the winding alleyways, past tidy kitchen gardens and restaurant seating scaling the steep streets like tiers in a lecture hall. A five-year-old rips past on an old grey scooter. The smell of freshly baked bread fills the close street.

The highlights do not disappoint: the famous Campo where the Palio takes place, its intricate herringbone brick floor covered in soft, sandy soil for the event. And the Cathedral – clearly Tim Burton's inspiration for the aesthetic of *Beetlejuice* – offers the architectural equivalent of a flash of inspiration as you move from its shrouding interior gloom and into the renaissance supernova of the Piccolomini Library.

From top: Sienese stable door; the front of Siena Cathedral; Siena gift shop; Siena Cathedral



Photograph © iStock





## CHIANTI

**T**his final day, Tuscany tries to woo me with peril. I am in the rear, red vinyl seat of a 1967 Fiat 500 – essentially a drinks can on wheels. Dario, our red-headed Siennese driver, is showing me his sunburn as we careen around the windy roads.

“From white mozzarella,” he says, showing me the pale underside of one forearm. “To,” he brought out the other forearm now, holding each side-by-side for effect, “red lobster!”

He loses his machine gun laugh. Surely, that time, there was no way he could have had a hand on the wheel. But it is thrilling fun with Dario and his partner-in-crime, Ciro – a pure expression of over-caffeinated Italian charm – driving the other orange Fiat 500. We harum-scarum around the winding S22 (the Chianti road), gazing out over the densely forested hills, the handsome stitching of the region’s 200 vineyards, the cypresses, the farms – the image of Tuscany now within touching distance.

We slow for delicious Chianti Classico tasting at the genial wine shops of Castellina in Chianti, and a spot of meandering around the artisan shops of UNESCO gem Monteriggioni. Later, back at the hotel and restless, I take my camera, hire a bicycle and head out along an empty country road. I pass a tiny vivid vineyard backlit by the sun, and plough through the scent of cypress gathering in the shade. The road ends at a castle, ivy sacking the ramparts, but from a nearby olive grove I see the shot that I’ve wanted: those rolling hills capped with weathered stone buildings – perfect Tuscany. As I sit down in the long grass, I realise that there are two sides to the valley, that the image is no longer empty. ■



### INFORMATION

► Citalia (☎ 01293 731 753, [www.citalia.com](http://www.citalia.com)), the leading Italian specialist, has a five-night break to experience the Tuscany coast and countryside from £785 per person. The package includes three nights’ accommodation at the five-star Principe di Piemonte in Viareggio followed by two nights at the five-star Castel Monastero near Siena, both on a B&B basis. The offer includes one free night of accommodation in Viareggio, five days of car hire, return flights from London Gatwick with easyJet. Based on departures on 26 September 2015. All activities described in this article can be arranged through Citalia.

*From top: Olive grove near Castel Monastero; Castel Monastero; Fiat 500s; Castellina in Chianti; Ciro and Dario on the Chianti road*





## THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



**DAWN CAVANAGH-HOBBS** is co-founder of the successful fractional ownership company Appassionata Ltd, a UK-based development business that specialises in the restoration and creation

of unique properties in the stunning region of Le Marche. [info@appassionata.com](mailto:info@appassionata.com)  
[www.appassionata.com](http://www.appassionata.com)



**KEVIN GIBNEY** has lived and worked in Italy for over a decade and is Managing Director at his Italian estate agency with top-to-bottom experience in finding, buying, selling and restoring properties.

His clients value his reality-based approach to property in Le Marche and beyond. ☎ +39 347 538 6668 [www.propertyforsalemarche.com](http://www.propertyforsalemarche.com)



**LAURA PROTTI** is dual qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor. She has extensive experience in Italian property law, international private law, contract law, succession law, and

taxation, and has assisted with the drafting and updating of books and articles on Italian Law. [www.leplaw.co.uk](http://www.leplaw.co.uk)



**MAXIMILLIAN SMITH** is Marketing Manager at De'Longhi UK and has a wealth of knowledge about coffee. De'Longhi make some of the best coffee machines on the market today – to see

the full range of options for home coffee machines see their website at [www.seriousaboutcoffee.com](http://www.seriousaboutcoffee.com)

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Our experts are here to help with all your questions about Italy.

Email your questions to [italia@anthem-publishing.com](mailto:italia@anthem-publishing.com), or write to us at our usual address, as given on page 18.

## FRACTIONAL FLEXIBILITY

**Q** *I've been visiting your website and am tempted to buy into the fractional ownership of one of your advertised properties in Le Marche. I understand that if I buy in I get five weeks per year of residency. Can you buy 'more for less'. I.e. If I wanted to buy 15 weeks (myself and my wife are retired) would you offer some sort of discount? And if we were to do that, and we weren't able (for whatever reason) to come over for the full 15 weeks, what are your rules regarding us 'selling on' some of the weeks to friends and family? Or, for that matter, via eBay?*

Rev. William Archer, Lincoln

**A** Here at Appassionata it is certainly possible to buy three shares (15 weeks each year) subject to availability in your chosen property. We do have four shares remaining in our latest property, Casa Tre Archi, a unique three bedroom townhouse built into the ancient arches of the medieval town of Petritoli. Our other properties are sold out and we start another new and exciting restoration project next week, a four bedroom property in the beautiful hamlet of Patrignone. This property will be completed in the next 12 months, but it is possible to pay a deposit before, which means you can also take advantage of our special launch price. One of our American owners has bought a share in two of our houses, giving him access to both a large farmhouse in the country and a town house with all amenities close at hand.

During the past seven years, Appassionata owners have never rented out their weeks; they love their time over here and often share their Italian homes with family and friends, but this would certainly be an option for you. Please feel free to contact me if you need any more information.

**Dawn Cavanagh-Hobbs**, Appassionata  
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[dawn@appassionataboutique.com](mailto:dawn@appassionataboutique.com)

## 'CHANGE OF USE' CHARGES

**Q** *Three months ago my wife and I bought a beautiful but totally unrestored 200-year-old farmhouse in Le Marche. The previous owner had the farmhouse registered as 'agricultural storage' with the local commune. Now that we have bought the property the commune is telling us that we have to pay them €13,000 for change of use to a habitable dwelling and that we have to do this before we can start to restore the property. Is the €13,000 a national, fixed figure or one that our commune has just arrived at in an attempt to recoup lost revenue whilst the property is classed as storage? Are local commune bills contestable?*

*We take Italia! magazine each month and have found it very inspiring and helpful, just please don't feature Le Marche too much as it is unspoiled by us British at the moment!*

John A Smith, via email

**A** The situation your reader describes is absolutely legitimate and standard operating procedure. The council in question is not in any way trying to recoup funds or otherwise squeeze cash out of a foreigner. In Italy, as in most places, structures fall into well-defined categories. Buildings registered as agricultural stores that are destined in a restoration project for a change of use to residential buildings will in every case carry the sort of charge to which the reader makes reference. Each council has its own formula and there can be some give-and-take as it relates to things like the size of the building, or if a floor of the building shows evidence of having been inhabited as residential space in the past. We always, as all estate agents ought to, point out such change-of-use charges to clients as part of full disclosure on their purchase and subsequent restoration plans. The reader should absolutely get a good, solid technical resource – like a *geometra* – who handles this sort of thing on a daily basis to look into the matter at hand. We can even, offline, provide the reader with referrals depending on where in Le Marche is property is located.

**Kevin Gibney**, Property For Sale Marche



## INHERITANCE TAX

**Q** As I understand it, the Law in the UK is about to change so that the first £1 million in value of the family home is no longer subject to inheritance tax. What are the property-related inheritance tax laws in Italy? My father has a terminal illness and my mother passed away some time ago. We split our time between our family home in Berkshire (worth approximately £1.35 million) and what we'd also consider our family home in Umbria (worth approximately £1.5 million). How would the respective country's inheritance tax laws apply in this instance? I have one brother.  
**Andrew Tuxdale, via email**

**A** Italian inheritance tax is calculated on the net value of the deceased's estate (ie, net of debts and liabilities). The Italian inheritance tax rate is 4 per cent, with an individual threshold of €1,000,000 ("franchigia"). Inheritance tax on immovable property is calculated on the land registry value (obtained by multiplying the property's land registry "allocated income" by a set coefficient that varies according to the property category (ie, residential house, office, garage, shop, etc.). The official land registry value of an immovable property is normally considerably lower than its market value. At the time of transfer heirs are also liable to pay additional land registry transfer taxes of 3 per cent of the official land registry value.

Assets located outside the UK are subject to UK inheritance tax if the deceased is deemed UK "domiciled" for inheritance tax purposes. HMRC treats someone who had their permanent home ('domicile') abroad as if it were in the UK ('deemed domicile') if:

- their permanent home was in the UK at any time 3 years prior to death;
- they were UK resident for at least 17 of the 20 income tax years prior to death.

The estate of a deceased person deemed domiciled in the UK must pay UK inheritance tax on all their worldwide assets, including property, bank accounts and investments. If they are not deemed domiciled, the estate must pay inheritance tax on their UK assets (unless excluded). In this case inheritance tax is not due on assets outside the UK.

To recognize a change of domicile HMRC requires evidence that someone has permanently left the UK and intends to live abroad indefinitely.

If the deceased was deemed domiciled in the UK for inheritance tax purposes, any inheritance tax paid in Italy can be offset due to the double taxation treaty between the two countries.

**Laura Protti, LEP Law**



HMRC requires evidence that you have left the country

**Laura Protti** is the founder of LEP Law. She is dual-qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor, and specialises in assisting British and Italian clients with matters relating to Italian law. Visit her website at [www.leplaw.co.uk](http://www.leplaw.co.uk) for more.



## Coffee Corner

### ELETTA CAPPUCCINO TOP

**Q** I recently bought a Eletta Cappuccino Top after reading about it in Italia! magazine. In my excitement to get it going I set it up and recycled the box. Unfortunately I'd left the instructions for the machine in the box. Are there instructions available online? And if so, where? Furthermore, I don't know the hardness of the water in my area so I can't set up my machine. How do I find that out? One last question: if I run out of coffee beans can I use ground coffee in the machine to make espresso and cappuccinos?  
**Elsa Martin, Essex**

**A** With any De'Longhi bean-to-cup coffee machine you can use both fresh beans and ground coffee. There is a special funnel at the top to add a scoop of pre-ground. We would always recommend using beans as it releases the very best flavour and aroma from the coffee.

If you want to discover more about coffee origins and qualities, visit [www.seriousaboutcoffee.com](http://www.seriousaboutcoffee.com)

For any product support information please visit: [www.delonghi.co.uk](http://www.delonghi.co.uk)

You can find a digital version of the instruction manual on the product page.

For further information on product set-up, how-to guides, maintenance and problem-solving visit the Customer Experience section of the website.

A water hardness test strip will have been in the instruction manual. To request a new one, free of charge, you can contact our Customer Experience department (details are available on the site). Alternatively, you can purchase the Coffee Care Kit from our website, which includes the test strip and all you need to keep your coffee machine in tip-top condition.

**Maximillian Smith, Trade Marketing Manager De'Longhi**  
[www.seriousaboutcoffee.com](http://www.seriousaboutcoffee.com)



The Eletta can use both fresh beans and ground coffee







*Congratulations on finding your dream home! But before you settle down to enjoy the view, there are a few jobs left to be done.*

# Buying a Home in Italy

## PART 3

In this final instalment of a three-part series on buying property in Italy, **Fleur Kinson** guides you through the details of the sale, your bureaucratic requirements, connection to utilities, and settling in to your new home...

**S**o you've finally found the property you want to buy. Woo-hoo! This is an exciting time. And in the tumult of elation you're hardly in the best state to think about the finer points of procedure, contracts, permits and utilities. But of course this is exactly the time when you must. Here, in tidy little chunks to keep the information manageable, are the vital points you need to know on executing the property sale, getting the right paperwork, and keeping the lights on in your new home...



Photography © iStock



## COMPLETING THE SALE

First things first. If you haven't already done this by the time you've found the property on which you want to make an offer, you urgently need to open an Italian bank account and get yourself a *codice fiscale* (which is just a personal code issued by the Italian Tax Office necessary to make any investment, contract or legal proceedings in the country). Your estate agent will probably have advised you on these two things already, and may even have helped to organize both for you, but if they haven't, swiftly get yourself to a bank and also contact the tax office or your embassy/consulate.

Furnished with a bank account and *codice fiscale*, you can now put in a formal offer or *proposta d'acquisto* on your desired property, and give a small deposit in guarantee (which will be refunded to you if the sale doesn't go ahead). There are often minor variations in what happens next, but usually it goes as follows. If the vendor accepts your offer, you now pay a further deposit called the *caparra confirmatoria*, which is normally about 10 per cent of the purchase price. (If you back out of the sale now, this deposit doesn't legally have to be returned to you, but if the vendor backs out, he or she must refund you in full.) With this comes what is

variously called the *compromesso*, the *promessa di vendita*, or the *contratto preliminare di vendita* – the big contract that sets out in full the conditions of the sale and includes all the relevant cadastral and registry information. To give this signed contract full legal force, you must register it within 20 days, which will cost around €170 in fees and around €15 in stamp duty. Again, your estate agent should help you with all this.

Now you move on to officially receiving the purchase title deed of the property (the *rogito* or *atto di compravendita*), and for this you will need the services of a *notaio*, or notary. A familiar figure to people from Latin nations, the *notaio* has no precise equivalent in countries with Anglo-Saxon legal traditions. He or she is an impartial party who validates the contracts transferring ownership, drafts the new deed, and witnesses you handing over the final payment and the vendor giving you the keys. Fees for a notary's services are usually between 1.5 and 2.5 per cent of the property's purchase price. Many buyers find that the final encounter with the *notaio*, in which the sale is finalized between vendor and buyer, to be a highly convivial affair – with smiles all round and a celebratory atmosphere.



Your final meeting will be with a notary, and is really just a formality

## PASSPORTS, PERMITS, HEALTHCARE

Now, what are the legalities on you actually spending time in Italy at your lovely new home? If you hold an EU member-state passport, there are no limits on this, of course. Move in immediately and stay for ever, if you like. But if you're from elsewhere, you'll have to get certain permissions if you want to stay in Italy for protracted periods of time or move in permanently. US nationals, for example, can stay for up to 90 days at a time, but beyond this should acquire a 'short-stay permit', which covers them for up to six months. For lengthier stays, a *permesso di soggiorno* is required. Getting one of these can take months, so do start the process as far in advance as you can if you're non-EU and you want to be in Italy for a long time!

In theory, any visitor to Italy must register with the nearest police station when they arrive and thus declare their presence in Italy. But have you ever done this when on holiday? Of course not. However, even if you're an EU national with the right to live and work in any EU country, and you want to stay at your home in Italy for a period longer than three months, you should register at the nearest town hall to receive a certificate that allows you to stay for up to five years. Beyond this, EU-passport-holders can request permanent residency status, and be given an *attestazione di soggiorno permanente*. All

this is surprisingly easy, given the legendary sloth of Italian bureaucracy on other matters.

Many of you will have no plans to stay at your new home in Italy for anything more than a few weeks at a time, and so much of the above is largely irrelevant to you. But there are some bits of bureaucracy and paperwork than anyone travelling to Italy for any duration should be sure to take with them. If you're an EU citizen, be absolutely sure to take your free EHIC card, so you can easily access free or very low-cost healthcare of every kind while in Italy. Italian healthcare is excellent, and often even better than what you might experience in the UK. Non-EU citizens may not be eligible for full coverage within Italy's state-provided healthcare system, however, and should look into health insurance or at least make sure that their travel insurance covers them for emergency treatment and evacuation.

And here's a tip. If you or anyone you're travelling with takes a prescription medicine, be sure to secure extra quantities of this for any trips to Italy, just in case it's not so convenient to get hold of more supplies while you're there. Of course, if you're flying to Italy, you should aim to carry these medicines in your hand luggage rather than taking the tiny risk of them getting lost with luggage stored in an aircraft's hold.



You will need to register at the town hall for longer stays in Italy





## UTILITIES AND SETTLING IN

Your new home in Italy is obviously going to be pretty uncomfortable if you don't have water or electricity. How do you go about ensuring a supply of both? First of all, note that it's easier to transfer a utility account from a property's previous resident than it is to set up an entirely new account. So if possible, ask the vendor not to cancel their utilities when they move out, but to transfer the account to your name instead. For a newly-built or newly-restored old home, you'll obviously have to set up all accounts yourself. Very often your estate agent will do this for you as part of their service, and if not, then they can at least advise you.

To set up water, electricity and a telephone, you'll need your *codice fiscale*, ID, bank details and address. You can register online or call the relevant service. Note that the price of water varies between different Italian regions, depending on its rainfall and water reserves. Bills are sent out twice a year and usage is metred. If you exceed annual limits, you'll be charged

extra. ENEL is the name of the Italian national electricity company, by the way. Most landlines are supplied by Telecom Italia, who can also arrange internet services. Other providers of both include Infostrada and Fastweb.

Note that amenities such as fuel, gas and electricity can be quite pricy in Italy. What you save on the country's inexpensive food, clothing, public transport and so on you might lose on household bills. Note that your consumption of electricity is often naturally limited by the fact that if you have too many electrical appliances burning at once, you'll short the system in your house and have to turn something off. You're not expected to need to use so much electricity at once. Note also that there's a sensible, growing trend towards generating sustainable energy at properties in Italy. Consider installing photo-voltaic cells (solar panels) and other means of harnessing this country's abundant sunshine. It would be a waste not to! And think how much you'll save on bills.



*There is a trend towards generating your own electricity*



*Wherever you move to, there will be surprises you cannot prepare for*

## ENJOY THE RIDE

It's useful to know lots of details and technicalities, what to expect when you buy a home in Italy and what to expect when you start to make your first trips out there to enjoy your new home, but in reality no practical advice can ever prepare you for the sheer adventure of it. There will be lots of unexpected things along the way, things you'll have to figure out, people you'll have to ask.

Go into your house-buying adventure prepared to be a bit confused at times and ready to work some aspects of it out as you go along. It should be exciting, not daunting. Remember that Italians are legendarily friendly, and there will always be someone willing to help when you just can't figure something out.

Good luck, and rest assured that it'll all be worth it in the end! ■

## INFORMATION

➤ For more information on Italy's regions and their – often very diverse – property markets, follow Fleur Kinson's regular *Homes in...* feature in this magazine, and to view properties available purchase in the country check the *Italia!* magazine website at [www.italytravelandlife.com](http://www.italytravelandlife.com)



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# 4 takes on COFFEE

Whether it's a late morning pick-me-up, a post-prandial dessert, or just an **excuse for decadence**, coffee can be used to make some sensational *dolci*. Here we present four classic takes...







## Chocolate and coffee mousse

### *Mousse al cioccolato e caffè*

A lovely, light dessert you can make the day before and refrigerate, while you concentrate on preparations for the party and the rest of the meal.

- SERVES** 4-6
- **Preparation**  
15 minutes
- **Cooking**  
5 minutes
- **Chilling**  
1 hour

- 100g good quality dark chocolate**
- 2 whole eggs**
- 1 tbsp coffee essence**
- 4 egg whites**
- 25g brazil nuts, chopped**

Melt the chocolate, then set aside to cool slightly. Whisk together the whole eggs with the coffee essence before beating in the chocolate.

In a clean bowl, whisk the egg whites until soft peaks form, then fold through the chocolate mixture until evenly combined. Spoon into ramekins or cappuccino cups and chill for at least 1 hour before serving sprinkled with the brazil nuts.



## Iced coffee

### *Caffè shakerato*

This is dangerously good with 30ml of bourbon added to it, a great way to finish a long, lazy weekend brunch.

- SERVES** 2
- **Preparation**  
10 minutes

- 200ml almond milk**
- 30ml bourbon**
- 2 scoops quality vanilla ice cream, made with real vanilla**
- 2 shots espresso**
- ice**

Mix in a cocktail shaker, serve over extra ice as desired. Garnish, if you wish, with a couple of whole coffee beans and a small scoop of vanilla ice cream. (If you use normal milk then you might want to add a little honey, say ½ tsp or so).







## Fruit and coffee cream

### *Crema di frutta e caffè*

On any warm evening, this beverage helps to drive away the heat of the day with its fresh, fruity, creamy, sweet taste.

**SERVES 2**  
► **Preparation**  
10 minutes

**1 double espresso**  
**200ml fresh passion fruit juice or syrup**  
**2 tsp honey**  
**50ml cold cream**  
**crushed ice**  
**50g roasted and caramelised hazelnuts, ground**

Place the espresso, passion fruit juice and crushed ice together in a shaker. Leave to stand briefly and then pour the contents into the glass.

Place the honey, cream and crushed ice in a separate shaker. Shake briefly and then pour slowly into the glass.

Sprinkle the ground hazelnuts on top.



## Coffee pavlova

### *Pavlova al caffè*

The meringues will keep in an airtight container for 2 days.

**MAKES 8**  
► **Preparation**  
15 minutes  
► **Cooking**  
1 hour  
► **Resting**  
a few hours

**4 egg whites**  
**200g caster sugar**  
**1 tsp white wine vinegar**  
**1 tsp coffee essence**  
**1 tbsp cornflour**

FOR THE CREAMY FILLING

**300ml double cream, lightly whipped**  
**4 tbsp Greek yogurt**  
**50g dark chocolate, finely chopped**  
**50g pecan nuts, toasted and roughly chopped**  
**1 tbsp coffee essence**

TO DECORATE

**50g pecan nuts, toasted and roughly chopped**  
**maple syrup and cocoa powder**

Preheat the oven to 110°C/Gas Mark ¼. Beat the egg whites until stiff. Add the sugar gradually, whisking all the time, until thick and glossy. You should be able to turn the bowl upside down without the meringue moving. Fold in the vinegar, coffee essence and cornflour.

Line 2 baking sheets with baking parchment, using a bit of meringue to stick it down. Divide mix into 8, making a small dip in the centre, then bake for 1 hour. Switch off oven and leave to cool for a few hours.

For the cream filling, mix all the ingredients together. If it is a little stiff, just add a touch of unwhipped cream to thin it down.

To serve, place a pavlova on a plate, top with a dollop of cream, scatter over the pecans, drizzle over the syrup and dust with cocoa.



# Italian favourites

A salad from Tuscany, a pasta course from Rome, a meat dish from Piedmont, and a dessert that is quintessentially Sicilian...



## Bread salad

### *Panzanella*

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 5 minutes, plus 45 minutes resting ► **COOKING** none

*This Tuscan summer salad makes the perfect lunchtime starter, or it can be developed into a more substantial meal in itself with the addition of grilled fish fillets, or even canned tuna in olive oil.*

8 slices stale homemade bread  
4 fist-sized ripe, fresh tomatoes  
1 large onion, peeled  
1 large cucumber

a handful of basil leaves, washed and dried  
extra virgin olive oil, to taste

red wine vinegar, to taste  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Soak the bread in cold water for about 15 minutes, then squeeze dry in a cloth.

Slice the tomatoes, onion and cucumber. Tear the basil into small pieces.

Mix the bread with the tomatoes, onion and cucumber. Dress with the basil, olive oil, vinegar and salt and pepper. Mix thoroughly and leave to stand for 30 minutes before serving.

*TIP: If you don't have home-made ('casareccio') bread, try a 'rustic' loaf.*



# Pasta carbonara

## *Pasta carbonara*

➤ **SERVES** 4 ➤ **PREPARATION** 5 minutes ➤ **COOKING** 15 minutes

*This recipe is supposed to have originated with the charcoal burners – the ‘carbonari’ – of Rome. The most important ingredient of the dish, therefore, is lots of coarsely ground black pepper, which represents the charcoal.*

**400g bucatini or spaghetti**

**250g pancetta, guanciale or best-quality streaky bacon, cubed**

**4 large free-range eggs, beaten**

**5 tbsp grated pecorino cheese (or parmesan, at a pinch!)**

**sea salt and plenty of coarsely ground black pepper**

Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil and put the pasta on to cook.

Meanwhile, in a very hot frying pan, fry the pancetta until crisp and running freely with fat.

Also meanwhile, beat the eggs in a bowl, then add and mix in the cheese and plenty of black pepper.

When the pasta is cooked, drain it, then return it to the saucepan.

Pour over the eggs, cheese and pancetta immediately. Stir everything together so the eggs scramble ever so lightly and pull the dish together. Serve at once.

*TIP: The trick is to add the eggs to the pasta away from direct heat but while the pasta is still hot, so that the eggs cook just enough to hold the sauce together.*





## Veal escalope with Marsala

### *Scaloppine al Marsala*

➤ **SERVES** 4 ➤ **PREPARATION** 5 minutes ➤ **COOKING** 10 minutes

*The scaloppina is an integral part of every Italian kitchen. There are many variations, but this is the classic Marsala version from Piedmont – although the wine comes from Sicily.*

8 veal escalopes, trimmed carefully

2-3 tbsp plain white flour

50g unsalted butter

1 wine glass Marsala

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Flatten the meat carefully until very thin, and then toss lightly in flour. Be sure not to flour the meat in advance as it will turn to glue and spoil the dish – only flour just before you are ready to fry.

Heat the butter in a large pan and quickly fry the meat on both sides for 2 minutes, then season with salt and pepper. Take the meat out of the pan and arrange on a warmed serving dish.

Pour the wine into the hot pan. Allow the alcohol to burn off, scrape the bottom of the pan thoroughly to amalgamate the juices from the meat and the butter, stir and reduce the sauce a little before pouring over the meat. Serve at once.

*TIP: Serve this with fresh seasonal vegetables – the new season's carrots would make a lovely addition. We enjoyed it with sprouting broccoli.*





# Cassata Siciliana

## *Cassata siciliana*

➤ **SERVES** 10 ➤ **PREPARATION** 25 minutes plus 3 hours chilling ➤ **COOKING** none

*This sumptuous Sicilian classic is traditionally made in the springtime, when milk for cheese-making is plentiful. Its origins lie deep in the island's culinary history – the term 'cassata' comes from an Arabic word for 'large bowl'.*

**500g very fresh ricotta cheese**

**150g icing sugar, sifted**

**1 tsp vanilla essence**

**3 tbsp rum or liqueur**

**3 tbsp cooking chocolate, splintered**

**3 tbsp chopped mixed candied peel**

**300g sponge cake, cut in thin slices**

**6 tbsp custard**

### **TO DECORATE**

**pale green fondant icing**

**flakes of chocolate, candied fruit, glacé fruit, silver balls, sugared almonds, rice paper flowers**

Push the ricotta through a sieve, then blend it lightly with the icing sugar until it is of the consistency of lightly whipped cream. Flavour it with the vanilla essence and rum or liqueur.

Mix in the chocolate splinters and candied peel. Line a 15cm bowl or pudding basin with clingfilm, pulled tightly to prevent creases, then line it with thin slices of sponge cake, squashing the cake into place evenly and using the custard to cement the slices together securely.

Fill with the ricotta mixture, levelling the top carefully. Put a plate on the top and press it down hard. Put a weight on top,

then place it in the refrigerator for about 2-3 hours, or longer if possible.

Turn the cassata out onto a plate and ice it carefully with the soft fondant icing. Dip a palette knife into boiling hot water to help you smooth the icing perfectly.

Decorate it as much as possible with chocolate flakes, candied fruit and so on to make it look like the wonderfully baroque Sicilian dessert that is famous all over the world. Chill until required.





# Pronto!

Some of the more complex Italian recipes will take hours to prepare – and just as long to enjoy! – but when you're in a hurry you're going to need quick-and-easy meals to prepare. *Italia!* presents five of our favourites...



## Scallops in saffron sauce with tagliatelle

### *Capesante allo zafferano con tagliatelle*

Nothing says luxury quite like saffron. It is more expensive than gold, yet just a few strands will add inimitable highlights to any fish dish.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 10 minutes

120g tagliatelle

1 tbsp olive oil

6 scallops

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

fennel tops or dill sprigs (optional)

FOR THE SAFFRON SAUCE

50ml dry white wine

1 pinch of saffron threads

1 shallot, peeled, finely chopped

75ml double cream

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

First make the saffron sauce. Place the wine in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the saffron strands and shallot to the saucepan, lower the heat and reduce the wine by half. Stir in the cream, bring the liquid to the boil, then reduce until quite thick. Season well.

Cook the pasta in a saucepan of boiling water, according to the packet instructions. Meanwhile, heat a frying pan with 1 tbsp olive oil, season the scallops, then cook them for 1 minute on each side in the hot frying pan.

Drain the pasta and return to the saucepan. Pour the saffron sauce over and mix. Arrange the pasta on plates with three scallops on each pile. Garnish with fennel tops or dill sprigs.



## Asparagus and Parmesan tart

### *Crostata di asparagi e Parmigiano-Reggiano*

If asparagus is out of season, as it is now, early season baby leeks will make a great alternative in this recipe.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 40 minutes

100g shortcrust pastry

FOR THE FILLING

4-5 asparagus spears

125ml double cream

1 free-range egg

½ tsp grated nutmeg

50g Parmesan or Grana Padano, grated

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

16cm tart tin or two small tart cases

Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas Mark 7. Roll out the shortcrust pastry to fit the inside of your tart tin, place it inside, and neaten off the edge at the top of the tin. Prick the bottom and sides of the pastry, then lay some parchment paper on the inside of the pastry case. Top with baking beans and blind bake the pastry cases in the oven for around 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the filling. Boil the asparagus spears in a saucepan of boiling water until tender, for around 4 minutes (alternatively you can steam the spears). Drain the asparagus. Place the cream, egg, nutmeg, and Parmesan together in a small bowl and season generously. Mix together well.

Lay the asparagus in the centre of the tart cases. If using smaller cases, snap the spears in half. Pour the creamy filling over the top, so it doesn't quite reach the top of the tart shell.

Turn the oven down to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Place the tarts in the oven and cook the small ones for 10-15 minutes, or the larger one for 15-20 minutes. Serve with a mixed salad.





## Chicken in pizza sauce with broccoli

### *Pollo alla pizzaiola con broccoli*

Chicken in pizza sauce. What better midweek TV dinner could you possibly think of? And it goes so well with broccoli. For texture serve this with crunchy ciabatta – perfect for soaking up the remaining sauce.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 15 minutes

2 chicken breasts  
1 tbsp olive oil  
50ml dry white wine  
1 tin of chopped tomatoes  
1 small head of broccoli  
1 tbsp capers  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
100g mozzarella

Chop the chicken breasts into large chunks. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan, then add the chunks of chicken breast and sauté for 4 minutes.

Add the wine to the frying pan, and allow to evaporate. Pour in the tin of chopped tomatoes, and lower the heat to a slow simmer. Leave to simmer for around 7-8 minutes.

In the meantime, cut the broccoli into florets and steam for around 3-4 minutes until tender. Set aside. Add the capers to the chicken, and check the seasoning. Tear the mozzarella over the top and serve with the broccoli.



## Baked endives with dolcelatte béchamel

### *Indivia al forno con besciamella e dolcelatte*

It depends where you are, but some British people think of 'endives' as leaves, and call the vegetable head used in this dish 'chicory'. They're related. So is radicchio, which would work too. Dolcelatte ('sweet milk') is a blue cheese, like a mild Gorgonzola.

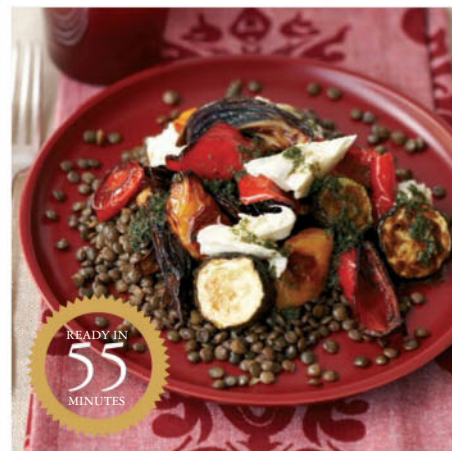
- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 40 minutes

3 heads of endive, cut horizontally in half  
FOR THE CARAMELISED ONIONS  
2 large red onions, peeled  
25ml olive oil  
100ml balsamic vinegar  
50g caster sugar  
FOR THE BÉCHAMEL  
60g unsalted butter  
60g plain flour  
570ml milk  
100g dolcelatte, crumbled

First prepare the onions. Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Slice the onions into 1cm rounds, then add them to a baking tray and sprinkle with the olive oil, balsamic vinegar and sugar. Mix thoroughly and place in the oven for 40 minutes.

Next, make the béchamel sauce by melting the butter in a saucepan; then add the flour and stir for 2 minutes. Add the milk, bring to the boil and whisk until thickened. Stir in the dolcelatte.

Lay the endives in an oven-proof dish, cut side facing upwards, and spoon the béchamel sauce over the top. Place in the oven for 20-30 minutes. Serve with the onions spooned on top.



## Roasted vegetables with lentils, mozzarella and mint oil

### *Verdure al forno con lenticche, mozzarella e olio alla menta*

This is a great way to use all those summer vegetables that are so fresh and cheap to buy right now. Don't be shy to try some variations according to what you can find.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 45 minutes

2 small courgettes  
1 small red pepper  
1 small yellow pepper  
1 small red onion, peeled  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 tbsp olive oil  
120g Castelluccio lentils  
1 ball of Mozzarella di Bufala Campana  
FOR THE MINT OIL  
1 small bunch of mint, finely chopped  
55ml extra virgin olive oil

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Wash, then cut the courgettes into 2cm rounds. Cut the peppers into 12 chunks and the red onion into eighths. Place all the vegetables onto a large baking tray, season well, then drizzle with olive oil. Roast for 45 minutes.

Place the mint in a small bowl with the olive oil and leave to infuse until you are ready to use it.

Meanwhile, boil a saucepan of water and cook the lentils according to packet instructions, until tender but al dente. Once cooked, drain the lentils, then place onto plates. Remove the vegetables from the oven and place on top of the lentils. Season well. Tear the mozzarella over the vegetables, then drizzle with the mint oil.



# OLIVE OIL

It has been reputedly used since 6,000BC, and originates from Greece and ancient Asia Minor, but what of the modern-day oils on offer?

*Italia!* selects **seven of the best...**

**W**e all use olive on a virtually daily basis. It's become a staple in the kitchens of everyone who loves all things Italian. Arguments will rage as to which country produces the best – Spain? Greece? Italy? – though here at *Italia!* we know which we prefer! In this issue we've tried and tasted a selection of premium oils; ones ideally used to dress salads or for dipping bread rather than cooking. Fine extra virgin olive oil burns at a relatively low temperature, ruining the health benefits and spoiling the taste. So when cooking with olive oil you're better off going for cheaper non-extra virgin alternatives. But for adding taste to a salad, it's worth spending that little bit extra for a quality olive oil. Tastes vary greatly across Italy where different olive varieties are employed and the average temperatures have a huge effect; from 'grassy' to 'peppery' here's our selection...



## TENUTA MARMORELLE 'ZERO'

From **Tenuta Marmorelle**  
[www.tenutamarmorelle.com](http://www.tenutamarmorelle.com)  
Price **£14.95** for 500ml

Some extra virgin olive oils can be over-pungent... Full of flavour, yes, but over-powering to the point of distracting you from the tastes of the food you're dressing. The best oils employ balance and finesse, and the Zero oil – which harks from Puglia – manages to maintain the perfect balance between flavour and strength. It has bold, fruity flavours (strawberries, rosemary, even a touch of clove), but no matter what you use it with it maintains a unique precision of clarity and is the perfect complement to salads, cheeses, griddled steaks, barbecued fish... Pretty well anything, in fact. But to sample it in its purest form, simply dip in a piece of the finest-quality bread (indeed, it's great with char-grilled *ciabatta*.)



### VERDICT ★★★★★

The editor's family's favourite, and for good reason... This magnificent oil from Puglia tastes sublime without being over-powering.

## 1 BASSO EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From **Quality Italian deli's**  
Price (Typically) **£5.50** for 500ml

Despite being a 'blend of olive oils from the European Union', the Basso branded oil from Naples is a great, if not perfect one. Dark green in colour it possesses a fine texture and a peppery flavour that ensures your salad has a bit of 'kick'.

### VERDICT ★★★

Best when used to dress simple green salads or finely-sliced tomatoes. It has a bit of fire to it, so use it sparingly.

## 2 RAINERI BLACK LABEL EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From **Camisa Fine Foods**  
[www.camisa.co.uk](http://www.camisa.co.uk)  
Price **£6.00** for 500ml

This is another oil with plenty of flavour – apples, thyme, a pinch of pepper – but one that is subtle and not at all over-powering. Yellow-gold in colour it comes from Liguria. It represents great value for money.

### VERDICT ★★★★★

A very decent oil for the money asked, it has plenty of flavours going on in the mouth, but doesn't over-power your food.





3

### 3 PLANETA EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From Carluccio's

[www.carluccios.com](http://www.carluccios.com)

Typical price £14.95 for 500ml

The Planeta brand is synonymous with Sicily, and the company's single-estate olive oil is among the best. Vibrant both in colour and taste it has a tremendous depth of flavour. Strong, full of spice and great mixed with a little balsamic.

#### VERDICT ★★★★★

One of the best olive oils Sicily has to offer. Full of sun-drenched fruit and packing a real punch, this spicy oil will bolster pretty much any dish.



4

### 4 SAN LEANDRO EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From Sainsbury's

[www.sainsburys.co.uk](http://www.sainsburys.co.uk)

Price £5.50 for 500ml

This golden oil available from Sainsbury's has a very mild olive flavour, with just a touch of pepper, making it perfect when dressing lunchtime salads. It's also great with grilled fish and vegetables.

#### VERDICT ★★★

Milder than most, this extra virgin olive oil is simple and subtle. There's a hint of pepper about it, and it goes really well with sea bass.



5

### 5 RAVIDA EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From Waitrose

[www.waitrose.com](http://www.waitrose.com)

Price £17.95 for 500ml

An olive oil of huge impact and complexity, this is about as good as it gets – though no one could suggest it's cheap! We loved it drizzled over grilled artichokes where it perfectly complemented the flavour of the vegetables. Simply one of the best.

#### VERDICT ★★★★★

No, this isn't an oil to use every day on account of the cost, but when you're trying to impress dinner guests this is the oil to turn to.



6

### 6 CULTUS BONI EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

From Waitrose

[www.waitrose.com](http://www.waitrose.com)

Price £14.95 for 500ml

Another cracking olive oil from the buyers at Waitrose, this has a really distinctive flavour, rich and yet fresh, bursting with ripe olives and a touch of apple peel. It has enough depth to it to complement grilled pork chops.

#### VERDICT ★★★★★

Another high-end oil to be used sparingly, but one that surprises with its intensity and depth of flavour. Great with grilled meats.



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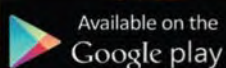
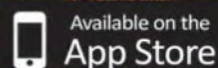
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# AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA

Made using the intriguing method of drying the grapes before pressing, Amarone wines are among the best Italy has to offer. But, **Paul Pettengale** asks, are styles changing with time?

**W**ine is on the move in the Veneto region of Italy. As you may have read in a recent issue of *Italia!*, Prosecco – the wonderful sparkler from the area – has now outstripped Champagne sales in the UK. Pinot Grigio – another wine associated with the region – continues to storm across the globe. But should some things remain sacred?

*The grapes are harvested in the autumn but then left to dry out over the winter*

This month we're looking at Amarone, the wine that is made using (typically) three grape varieties from the Valpolicella zone (near Verona), where the grapes are harvested in the autumn but then left to dry out over the winter before being pressed the following spring. It's a long-standing, traditional method of creating dry-though-sweet wines in Italy, strong in alcohol and robust in flavour. But there are changes afoot. Some Amarone wines are appearing on the market that are lighter, fresher and less intoxicating. Of course, the same method of production is being used, but these wines have less of the 'sledgehammer' associated with the style; they are more subtle, both on the nose and in the mouth. Turn the page to read about eight wines we've selected that represent both the old and the new. ➤







## AMARONE CLASSICO 'VIGNETI DI ROCCOLO', CANTINA NEGRAR 2012

From Majestic

[www.majestic.co.uk](http://www.majestic.co.uk)

Price £23.00 (see text)

Amarone wines can be kept for years – decades, even – and often benefit from a time in the cellar. But this wine from Cantina Negrar is drinking well now, just three years since it was crafted. Though certainly robust and full of character, it has a raspberry and strawberry aroma that is fresh and inviting. It develops in the mouth and has a long, satisfying finish. Buy two bottles from Majestic for just £18 a pop. Bargain.

## AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO 'NOVAIA' 2010, CORTE VAONA

From Berry Bros. & Rudd

[www.bbr.com](http://www.bbr.com)

Price £31.95

Now, this is a more traditional-styled Amarone wine. You can tell as soon as you pour it into the glass – there's a distinctive purple hue to the bubbles produced as the wine is served. Typical tobacco and dark chocolate aromas marry with stewed blackberries and a lovely sweet earthiness. Take a sip and you're gratified with plenty of fruit – and is that a hint of mint? A classic Amarone that you could lay down for years.

## AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2010, VILLA ANNABERTA

From The Co-operative

[www.co-operativefood.co.uk](http://www.co-operativefood.co.uk)

Price £17.99

If you're lucky enough to be within reasonable distance of a local Co-op store then you're in for a treat. The company's range of wines has improved significantly over recent years, and this Amarone exemplifies the ability and knowledge of its buyers. With abundant forest fruit, mixed with sage and thyme on the nose, this wine is a cracker for the money. It falls somewhere between the old and new styles of Amarone, and is worth a try.

## VAIO ARMARON AMARONE 'SEREGO ALIGHIERI' 2007, MASI

From Berkmann Wine Cellars

[www.berkmann.co.uk](http://www.berkmann.co.uk)

Price £39.99

Masi is one of the best-known names in the Veneto in terms of wine production, and for good reason... Believe it or not this particular Amarone is considered an 'entry-level' wine for the company, though when tasted you'd be astounded to consider it so. As you would expect from Masi, this is a traditional-styled wine ripe in both aroma and flavour that feature soft summer fruits and warming spiced plum respectively.



### GREAT WITH...

Slow-roasted pork belly that's had plenty of time marinating with rosemary.



### GREAT WITH...

This is a wine that would go perfectly with roasted leg of lamb on a Sunday.



### GREAT WITH...

Pork or beef sausages with polenta and a tomato-based sauce.



### GREAT WITH...

There's only one way to go with this wine. Order a piece of forerib of beef.



**AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA VALPANTENA VILLA ARVEDI 2011, BERTANI**

From Great Western Wine  
www.greatwesternwine.co.uk  
Price £34.50

If you've already read the introduction to this month's *Drink Italia!* then you'll know that we've questioned the modern style of producing Amarone wines. This example from Great Western Wine answers a lot of questions. Whilst harking back to the traditional style, this Bertani wine delivers sour cherries, raspberries, wild strawberries and – well – a freshness of flavour that brings Amarone to a whole new level.



**GREAT WITH...**

Chuck a few steaks on the griddle pan and call in the best of friends to share.

**AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2012, CANTINA DI NEGRAR**

From Waitrose  
www.waitrose.com  
Price £19.99

It's hard to fine an Amarone wine that could possibly be described as 'a bargain', but this one from Waitrose is about as close as you're going to find. Open it up and you're rewarded with wonderful aromas of violets, bitter chocolate and spice. Pour a glass, take a sip and you'll be able to appreciate the wine-making skills of Cantina di Negrar. Soft, smooth and yet robust and powerful, this is an excellent Amarone.



**GREAT WITH...**

We'd sup this with pasta dishes served with a duck or venison ragù.

**ALPHA ZETA 'A' AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2012**

From Liberty Wines  
www.libertywines.co.uk  
Price £28.95

Old world meets new and traditional style meets modern with this Alpha Zeta wine, created by a New Zealander in association with his Italian colleagues. Though dark when poured from the bottle into the glass, it retains a freshness of fruit and a lighter character to taste. And then it develops... Gaining in power and precision as you take a second sip, this is an incredibly well-crafted wine.



**GREAT WITH...**

Roasted red meats – beef and lamb especially – or with mature hard cheeses.

**THE BEST OF THE BEST?**

**B**low the budget then... Drinking perfectly well right now, though it will last (if properly stored) for years, this Allegrini Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2010 – RRP £58.99 – from Liberty Wine Cellars, is about as good as it gets. Supremely rich and complex, it boasts dark cherry mixed with bramble and damson. It has cigar tobacco and coffee on the nose and a lingering finish to die for. We're a long way off, for sure, but this is the perfect wine to enjoy with roasted goose and all the trimmings on Christmas Day. It'll certainly keep till then!

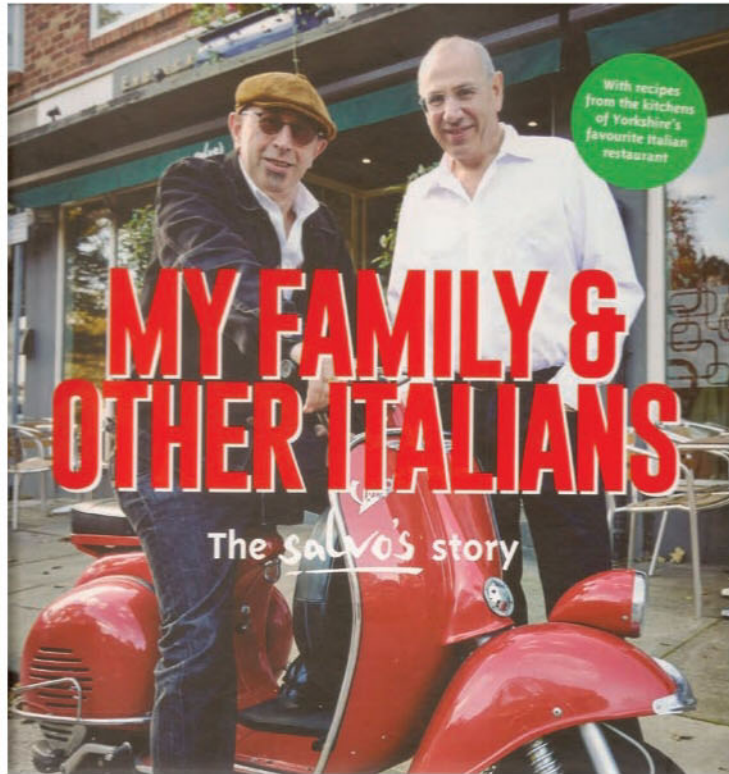


*Dark cherry with  
bramble and damson*



# IN PRINT

In this issue we travel to the north of England to discover the story of **Salvo's restaurant**, we stroll through Rome with Mario Erasmo, and we take in a series of stories regarding the Italian occupation of Libya...



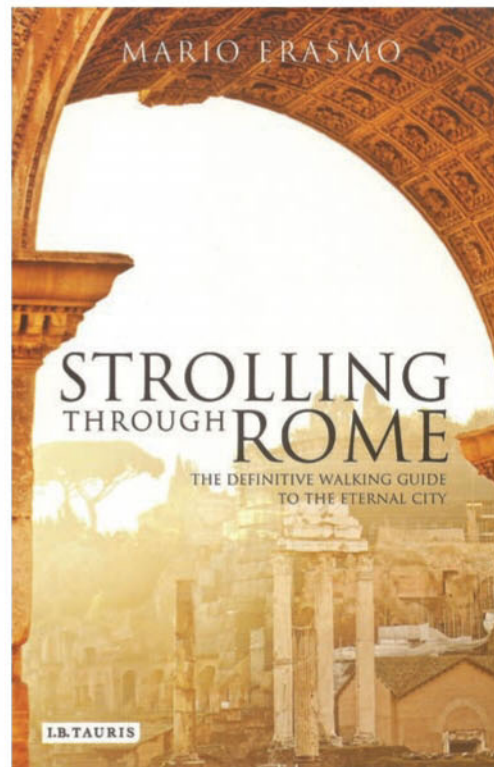
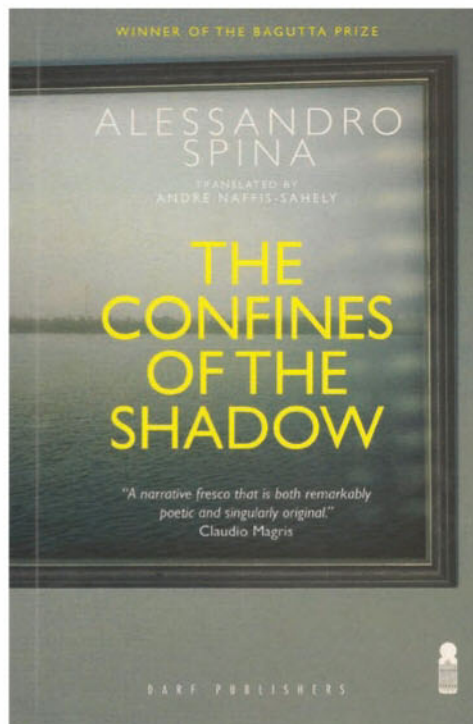
## ◀ MY FAMILY & OTHER ITALIANS

*John & Gipi Dammone, RMC Books, £16.95 (hardback)*

From southern Italy and the island of Sicily to Leeds in the north of England, *My Family & Other Italians* traces the history of the Dammone family and their pilgrimage from homeland to strange-land, where Salvatore Dammone established what has become one of the UK's best-known Italian restaurants. This book presents the intriguing story of a family on the move, borne out through comment and recipes. It describes how secretive food preparation could be for the Dammone family: "Salvo would prepare the pizza dough behind a locked door, with his jacket over the keyhole so no-one could see." A delightful, expressive and heart-warming tale in combination with a wide selection of recipes passed down, first through generations, and now to you, the reader. (Next issue: an exclusive extract.)

## THE CONFINES ▶ OF THE SHADOW

*Alessandro Spina, Darf Publishers, £9.99 (paperback),*  
Originally published in Italian in 2007 – when it won the Bagutta Prize for literature – this collection of novellas and short stories documents the relationship between West and East in Benghazi before, during and after the period at the beginning of the 20th century when Italy colonised Libya. Written by a Syrian under an Italian pseudonym, the original draft was smuggled out of Libya in the French Consul's briefcase during General Gaddafi's time in power.



## ▲ STROLLING THROUGH ROME

*Mario Erasmo, I.B. Tauris, £12.99 (paperback)*

Rome boasts more than 2,500 years of history and is one of the most-visited cities in the world. It is, therefore, not a place you can become acquainted with in a weekend. So join Mario Erasmo on his journey through the streets, backwaters, *piazze* and various museums and tourist destinations in his new book, *Strolling Through Rome*. He successfully brings Rome's rich and varied history to life as he guides you through Italy's capital. Art, architecture, urban life and a sense of 'being' are combined in this essential read.



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# ITALIA! ICONS



From the economic disaster in Italy following the Second World War a design icon was created by a designer from its aeronautics industry. By the 1960s it had become a pre-eminent symbol of Italian style.

## #02

### THE PIAGGIO & CO. VESPA SCOOTER

Hear one coming and you know why it's called a Vespa – or 'wasp' as it translates into English. *Italia!* looks into the birth of a true Italian icon...

The years after World War II were harsh in Italy. Suffering from economic ruin, mass unemployment and the decimation of its military, the nation's more enterprising companies turned to innovation in a bid to recover. The Piaggio aeronautics factory had been destroyed during the war, but its spirit lived on, and in 1946 the company filed a patent for a motorcycle that incorporated the engine into the cycle body and used mudguards to prevent the build-up of dirt and grime. The Vespa, as it was to become known, was born.

Engineers Renzo Spolti and Vittorio Casini were responsible for the design of the Moto Piaggio No.5 – nicknamed the 'duckling' – in 1944, but owner Enrico Piaggio wasn't convinced and he contacted Corradino D'Ascanio from the company's aeronautical division to redesign the scooter, commissioning him to pay particular attention to the aerodynamics. Two years later an initial batch of just 13 Vespa bikes was released. A year later 2,500 had been produced. By 1960 the annual production had increased to over 60,000. And then, in 1962, the film *Roman Holiday*, starring Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn, hit the silver screen – and that's when sales *really* started to take off. ■



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Garofalo



76 SHAPES 5 RANGES



**Generations of knowledge**, talent and pride are concentrated in **Gragnano**, the pasta capital of Italy and **home to Garofalo Pasta**. **Garofalo has been making pasta in Gragnano since 1789**. Over 200 years of experience are a huge advantage in the development of the Garofalo Signature pasta ranges. Second and third generation workers have incorporated decades of knowledge in the art and skill of pasta making, with the efficiencies of today's technology.

Our **Traditional Pasta** and **Organic Pasta** is made with **high quality (14% Protein) durum wheat semolina**, no secret ingredients.

Garofalo **Organic Whole Wheat Pasta** is made using whole grain durum wheat; it is rich in aroma and unique in taste and texture.

Our **Children's Organic Pastas** are fun small shapes, perfect in size for babies and toddlers.

We've developed a truly tasty, high fibre **Gluten-Free Pasta**, using corn flour, rice flour and quinoa, and shaped through a traditional bronze die for texture.

**"Really good pasta" ★★★★★**

*I've bought several of the Garofalo range and they're all really good - I used to buy any dried pasta but the difference in taste and texture makes such a difference to the final dish.*

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